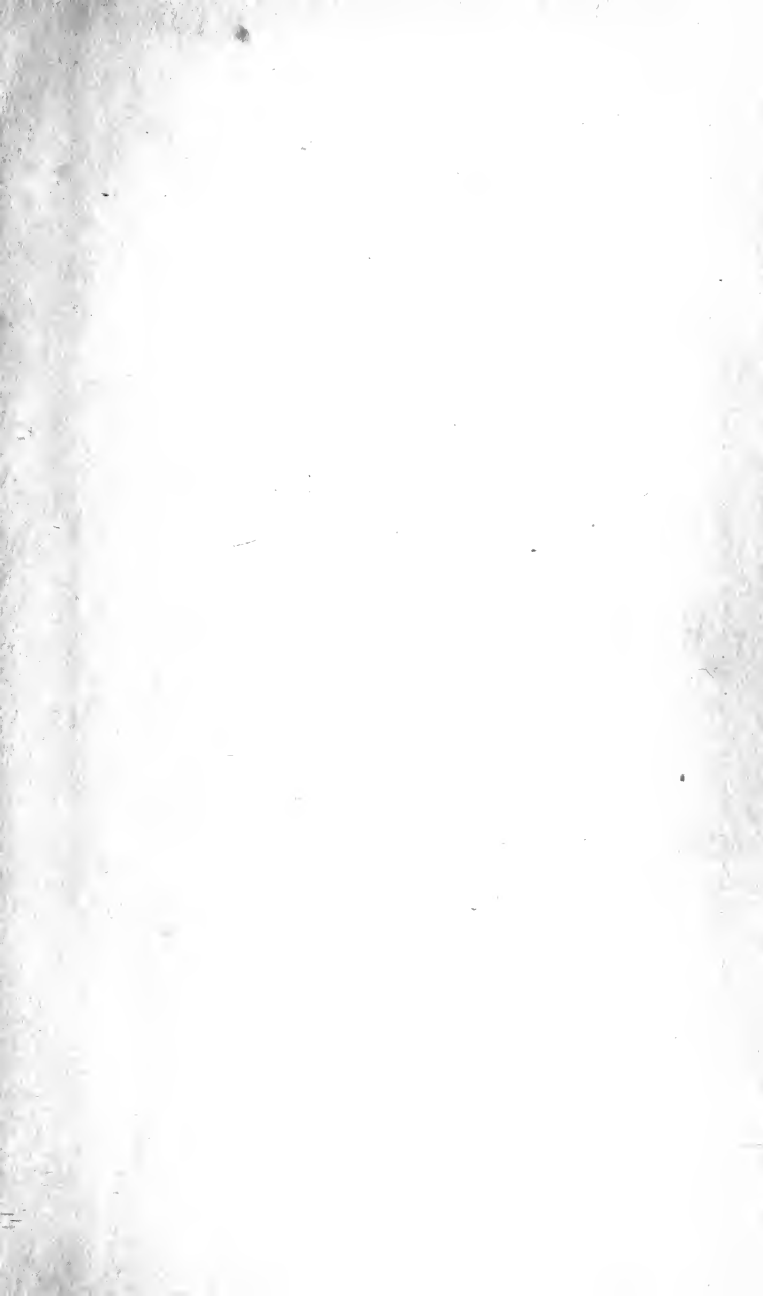







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MEDEA

## CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

MEDEA, *daughter of Aiêtês, King of Colchis.*

JASON, *chief of the Argonauts; nephew of Pelias, King of Iôlcos in Thessaly.*

CREON, *ruler of Corinth.*

AEGEUS, *King of Athens.*

NURSE of Medea.

TWO CHILDREN of Jason and Medea.

ATTENDANT on the children.

A MESSENGER.

CHORUS of Corinthian Women, with their LEADER.  
Soldiers and Attendants.

*The scene is laid in Corinth. The play was first acted when Pythodôrus was Archon, Olympiad 87, year 1 (B.C. 431). Euphorion was first, Sophocles second, Euripides third, with Medea, Philoctêtes, Dictys, and the Harvesters, a Satyr-play.*

## INTRODUCTION

THE *Medea*, in spite of its background of wonder and enchantment, is not a romantic play but a tragedy of character and situation. It deals, so to speak, not with the romance itself, but with the end of the romance, a thing which is so terribly often the reverse of romantic. For all but the very highest of romances are apt to have just one flaw somewhere, and in the story of Jason and Medea the flaw was of a fatal kind.

The wildness and beauty of the Argo legend run through all Greek literature, from the mass of Corinthian lays older than our present *Iliad*, which later writers vaguely associate with the name of Eumêlus, to the Fourth Pythian Ode of Pindar and the beautiful *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius. Our poet knows the wildness and the beauty; but it is not these qualities that he specially seeks. He takes them almost for granted, and pierces through them to the sheer tragedy that lies below.

Jason, son of Aeson, King of Iôlcus, in Thessaly, began his life in exile. His uncle Pelias had seized his father's kingdom, and Jason was borne away to the mountains by night and given, wrapped in a purple robe, to Chiron, the Centaur. When he

reached manhood he came down to Iôlcos to demand, as Pindar tells us, his ancestral honour, and stood in the market-place, a world-famous figure, one-sandalled, with his pard-skin, his two spears and his long hair, gentle and wild and fearless, as the Wise Beast had reared him. Pelias, cowed but loath to yield, promised to give up the kingdom if Jason would make his way to the unknown land of Colchis and perform a double quest. First, if I read Pindar aright, he must fetch back the soul of his kinsman Phrixus, who had died there far from home; and, secondly, find the fleece of the Golden Ram which Phrixus had sacrificed. Jason undertook the quest: gathered the most daring heroes from all parts of Hellas; built the first ship, Argo, and set to sea. After all manner of desperate adventures he reached the land of Aiêtês, king of the Colchians, and there hope failed him. By policy, by tact, by sheer courage he did all that man could do. But Aiêtês was both hostile and treacherous. The Argonauts were surrounded, and their destruction seemed only a question of days when, suddenly, unasked, and by the mercy of Heaven, Aiêtês' daughter, Mêdêa, an enchantress as well as a princess, fell in love with Jason. She helped him through all his trials; slew for him her own sleepless serpent, who guarded the fleece; deceived her father, and secured both the fleece and the soul of Phrixus. At the last moment it appeared that her brother, Absyrtus, was about to lay an ambush for Jason. She invited Absyrtus to her room, stabbed him dead, and fled

with Jason over the seas. She had given up all, and expected in return a perfect love.

And what of Jason? He could not possibly avoid taking Medea with him. He probably rather loved her. She formed at the least a brilliant addition to the glory of his enterprise. Not many heroes could produce a barbarian princess ready to leave all and follow them in blind trust. For of course, as every one knew without the telling in fifth-century Athens, no legal marriage was possible between a Greek and a barbarian from Colchis.

All through the voyage home, a world-wide baffled voyage by the Ister and the Eridanus and the African Syrtes, Medea was still in her element, and proved a constant help and counsellor to the Argonauts. When they reached Jason's home, where Pelias was still king, things began to be different. An ordered and law-abiding Greek state was scarcely the place for the untamed Colchian. We only know the catastrophe. She saw with smothered rage how Pelias hated Jason and was bent on keeping the kingdom from him, and she determined to do her lover another act of splendid service. Making the most of her fame as an enchantress, she persuaded Pelias that he could, by a certain process, regain his youth. He eagerly caught at the hope. His daughters tried the process upon him, and Pelias died in agony. Surely Jason would be grateful now!

The real result was what it was sure to be in a civilised country. Medea and her lover had to fly

for their lives, and Jason was debarred for ever from succeeding to the throne of Iôlcos. Probably there was another result also in Jason's mind : the conclusion that at all costs he must somehow separate himself from this wild beast of a woman who was ruining his life. He directed their flight to Corinth, governed at the time by a ruler of some sort, whether "tyrant" or king, who was growing old and had an only daughter. Creon would naturally want a son-in-law to support and succeed him. And where in all Greece could he find one stronger or more famous than the chief of the Argonauts? If only Medea were not there! No doubt Jason owed her a great debt for her various services. Still, after all, he was not married to her. And a man must not be weak in such matters as these. Jason accepted the princess's hand, and when Medea became violent, found it difficult to be really angry with Creon for instantly condemning her to exile. At this point the tragedy begins.

The *Medea* is one of the earliest of Euripides' works now preserved to us. And those of us who have in our time glowed at all with the religion of realism, will probably feel in it many of the qualities of youth. Not, of course, the more normal, sensuous, romantic youth, the youth of *Romeo and Juliet*; but another kind—crude, austere, passionate—the youth of the poet who is also a sceptic and a devotee of truth, who so hates the conventionally and falsely beautiful that he is apt to be unduly ascetic towards beauty itself. When a writer really deficient in poetry walks in this



path, the result is purely disagreeable. It produces its best results when the writer, like Euripides or Tolstoy, is so possessed by an inward flame of poetry that it breaks out at the great moments and consumes the cramping theory that would hold it in. One can feel in the *Medea* that the natural and inevitable romance of the story is kept rigidly down. One word about Medea's ancient serpent, two or three references to the Clashing Rocks, one startling flash of light upon the real love of Jason's life, love for the ship Argo, these are almost all the concessions made to us by the merciless delineator of disaster into whose hands we are fallen. Jason is a middle-aged man, with much glory, indeed, and some illusions; but a man entirely set upon building up a great career, to whom love and all its works, though at times he has found them convenient, are for the most part only irrational and disturbing elements in a world which he can otherwise mould to his will. And yet, most cruel touch of all, one feels this man to be the real Jason. It is not that he has fallen from his heroic past. It is that he was really like this always. And so with Medea. It is not only that her beauty has begun to fade; not only that she is set in surroundings which vaguely belittle and weaken her, making her no more a bountiful princess, but only an ambiguous and much criticised foreigner. Her very devotion of love for Jason, now turned to hatred, shows itself to have been always of that somewhat rank and ugly sort to which such a change is natural.

For concentrated dramatic quality and sheer intensity of passion few plays ever written can vie with the *Medea*. Yet it obtained only a third prize at its first production ; and, in spite of its immense fame, there are not many scholars who would put it among their favourite tragedies. The comparative failure of the first production was perhaps due chiefly to the extreme originality of the play. The Athenians in 432 B.C. had not yet learnt to understand or tolerate such work as this, though it is likely enough that they fortified their unfavourable opinion by the sort of criticisms which we still find attributed to Aristotle and Dicæarchus.

At the present time it is certainly not the newness of the subject : I do not think it is *Ægeus*, nor yet the dragon chariot, much less *Medea's* involuntary burst of tears in the second scene with *Jason*, that really produces the feeling of dissatisfaction with which many people must rise from this great play. It is rather the general scheme on which the drama is built. It is a scheme which occurs again and again in Euripides, a study of oppression and revenge. Such a subject in the hands of a more ordinary writer would probably take the form of a triumph of oppressed virtue. But Euripides gives us nothing so sympathetic, nothing so cheap and unreal. If oppression usually made people virtuous, the problems of the world would be very different from what they are. Euripides seems at times to hate the revenge of the oppressed almost as much as the original cruelty of the oppressor ; or, to put the same

fact in a different light, he seems deliberately to dwell upon the twofold evil of cruelty, that it not only causes pain to the victim, but actually by means of the pain makes him a worse man, so that when his turn of triumph comes, it is no longer a triumph of justice or a thing to make men rejoice. This is a grim lesson; taught often enough by history, though seldom by the fables of the poets.

Seventeen years later than the *Medea* Euripides expressed this sentiment in a more positive way in the *Trojan Women*, where a depth of wrong borne without revenge becomes, or seems for the moment to become, a thing beautiful and glorious. But more plays are constructed like the *Medea*. The *Hecuba* begins with a noble and injured Queen, and ends with her hideous vengeance on her enemy and his innocent sons. In the *Orestes* all our hearts go out to the suffering and deserted prince, till we find at last that we have committed ourselves to the blood-thirst of a madman. In the *Electra*, the workers of the vengeance themselves repent.

The dramatic effect of this kind of tragedy is curious. No one can call it undramatic or tame. Yet it is painfully unsatisfying. At the close of the *Medea* I actually find myself longing for a *deus ex machinâ*, for some being like Artemis in the *Hippolytus* or the good Dioscuri of the *Electra*, to speak a word of explanation or forgiveness, or at least leave some sound of music in our ears to drown that dreadful and insistent clamour of hate. The truth is that in this play Medea herself is the *dea ex machinâ*. The woman

whom Jason and Creon intended simply to crush has been transformed by her injuries from an individual human being into a sort of living Curse. She is inspired with superhuman force. Her wrongs and her hate fill all the sky. And the judgment pronounced on Jason comes not from any disinterested or peace-making God, but from his own victim transfigured into a devil.

From any such judgment there is an instant appeal to sane human sympathy. Jason has suffered more than enough. But that also is the way of the world. And the last word upon these tragic things is most often something not to be expressed by the sentences of even the wisest articulate judge, but only by the unspoken *lacrimæ rerum*.

G. M.

## M E D E A

*The Scene represents the front of MEDEA'S House in Corinth. A road to the right leads towards the royal castle, one on the left to the harbour. The NURSE is discovered alone.*

### NURSE.

1 Would God no Argo e'er had winged the seas  
2 To Colchis through the blue Symplêgades :  
3 No shaft of riven pine in Pêlion's glen  
4 Shaped that first oar-blade in the hands of men  
5 Valiant, who won, to save King Pelias' vow,  
6 The fleece All-golden ! Never then, I trow,  
7 Mine own princess, her spirit wounded sore  
8 With love of Jason, to the encastled shore  
9 Had sailed of old Iôlcô : never wrought  
10 The daughters of King Pelias, knowing not,  
11 To spill their father's life : nor fled in fear,  
12 Hunted for that fierce sin, to Corinth here  
13 With Jason and her babes. This folk at need  
14 Stood friend to her, and she in word and deed  
15 Served alway Jason. Surely this doth bind,  
16 Through all ill days, the hurts of humankind,  
17 When man and woman in one music move.  
18 But now, the world is angry, and true love

- 19 Sick as with poison. Jason doth forsake  
 20 My mistress and his own two sons, to make  
 21 His couch in a king's chamber. He must wed :  
 22 Wed with this Creon's child, who now is head  
 23 And chief of Corinth. Wherefore sore betrayed  
 24 Medea calleth up the oath they made,  
 25 They two, and wakes the clasped hands again,  
 26 The troth surpassing speech, and cries amain  
 27 On God in heaven to mark the end, and how  
 28 Jason hath paid his debt.

All fasting now

And cold, her body yielded up to pain,  
 Her days a waste of weeping, she hath lain,  
 Since first she knew that he was false. Her eyes  
 Are lifted not ; and all her visage lies  
 In the dust. If friends will speak, she hears no more  
 Than some dead rock or wave that beats the shore :  
 Only the white throat in a sudden shame  
 May writhe, and all alone she moans the name  
 Of father, and land, and home, forsook that day  
 For this man's sake, who casteth her away.  
 Not to be quite shut out from home . . . alas,  
 She knoweth now how rare a thing that was !  
 Methinks she hath a dread, not joy, to see  
 Her children near. 'Tis this that maketh me  
 Most tremble, lest she do I know not what.  
 Her heart is no light thing, and useth not  
 To brook much wrong. I know that woman, aye,  
 And dread her ! Will she creep alone to die  
 Bleeding in that old room, where still is laid  
 Lord Jason's bed ? She hath for that a blade  
 Made keen. Or slay the bridegroom and the king,  
 And win herself God knows what direr thing ?

'Tis a fell spirit. Few, I ween, shall stir  
Her hate unscathed, or lightly humble her.

Ha! 'Tis the children from their games again,  
Rested and gay; and all their mother's pain  
Forgotten! Young lives ever turn from gloom!

[*The CHILDREN and their ATTENDANT come in.*]

ATTENDANT.

Thou ancient treasure of my lady's room,  
What mak'st thou here before the gates alone,  
And alway turning on thy lips some moan  
Of old mischances? Will our mistress be  
Content, this long time to be left by thee?

NURSE.

Grey guard of Jason's children, a good thrall  
Hath his own grief, if any hurt befall  
His masters. Aye, it holds one's heart! . . .  
Meseems

I have strayed out so deep in evil dreams,  
I longed to rest me here alone, and cry  
Medea's wrongs to this still Earth and Sky.

ATTENDANT.

How? Are the tears yet running in her eyes?

NURSE.

'Twere good to be like thee! . . . Her sorrow lies  
Scarce wakened yet, not half its perils wrought.

## ATTENDANT.

Mad spirit ! . . . if a man may speak his thought  
Of masters mad.—And nothing in her ears  
Hath sounded yet of her last cause for tears !

*[He moves towards the house, but the NURSE  
checks him.]*

## NURSE.

What cause, old man ? . . . Nay, grudge me not one  
word.

## ATTENDANT.

'Tis nothing. Best forget what thou hast heard.

## NURSE.

Nay, housemate, by thy beard ! Hold it not hid  
From me. . . . I will keep silence if thou bid.

## ATTENDANT.

I heard an old man talking, where he sate  
At draughts in the sun, beside the fountain gate,  
And never thought of me, there standing still  
Beside him. And he said, 'Twas Creon's will,  
Being lord of all this land, that she be sent,  
And with her her two sons, to banishment.  
Maybe 'tis all false. For myself, I know  
No further, and I would it were not so.

## NURSE.

Jason will never bear it—his own sons  
Banished,—however hot his anger runs  
Against their mother !



## ATTENDANT.

Old love burneth low  
When new love wakes, men say. He is not now  
Husband nor father here, nor any kin.

## NURSE.

But this is ruin ! New waves breaking in  
To wreck us, ere we are righted from the old !

## ATTENDANT.

Well, hold thy peace. Our mistress will be told  
All in good time. Speak thou no word hereof.

## NURSE.

My babes ! What think ye of your father's love ?  
God curse him not, he is my master still :  
But, oh, to them that loved him, 'tis an ill  
Friend. . . .

## ATTENDANT.

And what man on earth is different ? How ?  
Hast thou lived all these years, and learned but now  
That every man more loveth his own head  
Than other men's ? He dreameth of the bed  
Of this new bride, and thinks not of his sons.

## NURSE.

Go : run into the house, my little ones :  
All will end happily ! . . . Keep them apart :  
Let not their mother meet them while her heart

Is darkened. Yester night I saw a flame  
 Stand in her eye, as though she hated them,  
 And would I know not what. For sure her wrath  
 Will never turn nor slumber, till she hath . . .  
 Go : and if some must suffer, may it be  
 Not we who love her, but some enemy !

VOICE (*within*).

O shame and pain : O woe is me !  
 Would I could die in my misery !

[*The CHILDREN and the ATTENDANT go in.*]

NURSE.

Ah, children, hark ! She moves again  
 Her frozen heart, her sleeping wrath.  
 In, quick ! And never cross her path,  
 Nor rouse that dark eye in its pain ;

That fell sea-spirit, and the dire  
 Spring of a will untaught, unbowed.  
 Quick, now !—Methinks this weeping cloud  
 Hath in its heart some thunder-fire,

Slow gathering, that must flash ere long.  
 I know not how, for ill or well,  
 It turns, this uncontrollable  
 Tempestuous spirit, blind with wrong.

VOICE (*within*).

Have I not suffered ? Doth it call  
 No tears ? . . . Ha, ye beside the wall  
 Unfathered children, God hate you  
 As I am hated, and him, too,  
 That gat you, and this house and all !

## NURSE.

For pity ! What have they to do,  
Babes, with their father's sin ? Why call  
Thy curse on these ? . . . Ah, children, all  
These days my bosom bleeds for you.

Rude are the wills of princes : yea,  
Prevailing alway, seldom crossed,  
On fitful winds their moods are tossed :  
'Tis best men tread the equal way.

Aye, not with glory but with peace  
May the long summers find me crowned :  
For gentleness—her very sound  
Is magic, and her usages

All wholesome : but the fiercely great  
Hath little music on his road,  
And falleth, when the hand of God  
Shall move, most deep and desolate.

*[During the last words the LEADER of the  
Chorus has entered. Other women follow  
her.]*

## LEADER.

I heard a voice and a moan,  
A voice of the eastern seas :  
Hath she found not yet her ease ?  
Speak, O agèd one.  
For I stood afar at the gate,  
And there came from within a cry,

And wailing desolate.

Ah, no more joy have I,  
For the griefs this house doth see,  
And the love it hath wrought in me.

NURSE.

There is no house ! 'Tis gone. The lord  
Seeketh a prouder bed : and she  
Wastes in her chamber, nor one word  
Will hear of care or charity.

VOICE (*within*).

O Zeus, O Earth, O Light,  
Will the fire not stab my brain ?  
What profiteth living ? Oh,  
Shall I not lift the slow  
Yoke, and let Life go,  
As a beast out in the night,  
To lie, and be rid of pain ?

CHORUS.

*Some Women.*

A.

“O Zeus, O Earth, O Light :”  
The cry of a bride forlorn  
Heard ye, and wailing born  
Of lost delight ?

## B.

Why weariest thou this day,  
    Wild heart, for the bed abhorred,  
The cold bed in the clay?  
Death cometh though no man pray,  
    Ungarlanded, un-adorèd.  
    Call him not thou.

## C.

If another's arms be now  
    Where thine have been,  
    On his head be the sin :  
Rend not thy brow !

## D.

All that thou sufferest,  
    God seeth : Oh, not so sore  
Waste nor weep for the breast  
    That was thine of yore.

VOICE (*within*).

Virgin of Righteousness,  
Virgin of hallowed Troth,  
Ye marked me when with an oath  
I bound him ; mark no less  
That oath's end. Give me to see  
Him and his bride, who sought  
My grief when I wronged her not,  
Broken in misery,

And all her house. . . . O God,  
 My mother's home, and the dim  
 Shore that I left for him,  
 And the voice of my brother's blood. . . .

## NURSE.

Oh, wild words ! Did ye hear her cry  
 To them that guard man's faith forsworn,  
 Themis and Zeus ? . . . This wrath new-born  
 Shall make mad workings ere it die.

## CHORUS.

*Other Women.*

## A.

Would she but come to seek  
 Our faces, that love her well,  
 And take to her heart the spell  
 Of words that speak ?

## B.

Alas for the heavy hate  
 And anger that burneth ever !  
 Would it but now abate,  
 Ah God, I love her yet.  
 And surely my love's endeavour  
 Shall fail not here.

## C.

Go : from that chamber dear  
 Forth to the day  
 Lead her, and say, Oh, say  
 That we love her dear.

D.

Go, lest her hand be hard  
On the innocent : Ah, let be !  
For her grief moves hitherward,  
Like an angry sea.

NURSE.

That will I : though what words of mine  
Or love shall move her ? Let them lie  
With the old lost labours ! . . . Yet her eye—  
Know ye the eyes of the wild kine,

The lion flash that guards their brood ?  
So looks she now if any thrall  
Speak comfort, or draw near at all  
My mistress in her evil mood.

*[The NURSE goes into the house.]*

CHORUS.

*A Woman.*

Alas, the bold blithe bards of old  
That all for joy their music made,  
For feasts and dancing manifold,  
That Life might listen and be glad.

But all the darkness and the wrong,  
Quick deaths and dim heart-aching things,  
Would no man ease them with a song  
Or music of a thousand strings ?

Then song had served us in our need.  
 What profit, o'er the banquet's swell  
 That lingering cry that none may heed?  
 The feast hath filled them : all is well !

*Others.*

I heard a song, but it comes no more,  
 Where the tears ran over :  
 A keen cry but tired, tired :  
 A woman's cry for her heart's desired,  
 For a traitor's kiss and a lost lover.  
 But a prayer, methinks, yet riseth sore  
 To God, to Faith, God's ancient daughter—  
 The Faith that over sundering seas  
 Drew her to Hellas, and the breeze  
 Of midnight shivered, and the door  
 Closed of the salt unsounded water.  
*[During the last words MEDEA has come  
 out from the house.]*

MEDEA.

Women of Corinth, I am come to show  
 My face, lest ye despise me. For I know  
 Some heads stand high and fail not, even at night  
 Alone—far less like this, in all men's sight :  
 And we, who study not our wayfarings  
 But feel and cry—Oh we are drifting things,  
 And evil ! For what truth is in men's eyes,  
 Which search no heart, but in a flash despise



A strange face, shuddering back from one that ne'er  
Hath wronged them? . . . Sure, far-comers any-  
where,

I know, must bow them and be gentle. Nay,  
A Greek himself men praise not, who alway  
Should seek his own will recking not. . . . But I—  
This thing undreamed of, sudden from on high,  
Hath sapped my soul : I dazzle where I stand,  
The cup of all life shattered in my hand,  
Longing to die—O friends ! He, even he,  
Whom to know well was all the world to me,  
The man I loved, hath proved most evil.—Oh,  
Of all things upon earth that bleed and grow,  
A herb most bruised is woman. We must pay  
Our store of gold, hoarded for that one day,  
To buy us some man's love ; and lo, they bring  
A master of our flesh ! There comes the sting  
Of the whole shame. And then the jeopardy,  
For good or ill, what shall that master be ;  
Reject she cannot : and if he but stays  
His suit, 'tis shame on all that woman's days.  
So thrown amid new laws, new places, why,  
'Tis magic she must have, or prophecy—  
Home never taught her that—how best to guide  
Toward peace this thing that sleepeth at her side.  
And she who, labouring long, shall find some way  
Whereby her lord may bear with her, nor fray  
His yoke too fiercely, blessed is the breath  
That woman draws ! Else, let her pray for death.  
Her lord, if he be wearied of the face  
Withindoors, gets him forth ; some merrier place  
Will ease his heart : but she waits on, her whole  
Vision enchained on a single soul.

And then, forsooth, 'tis they that face the call  
Of war, while we sit sheltered, hid from all  
Peril!—False mocking! Sooner would I stand  
Three times to face their battles, shield in hand,  
Than bear one child.

But peace! There cannot be  
Ever the same tale told of thee and me.  
Thou hast this city, and thy father's home,  
And joy of friends, and hope in days to come :  
But I, being citiless, am cast aside  
By him that wedded me, a savage bride  
Won in far seas and left—no mother near,  
No brother, not one kinsman anywhere  
For harbour in this storm. Therefore of thee  
I ask one thing. If chance yet ope to me  
Some path, if even now my hand can win  
Strength to requite this Jason for his sin,  
Betray me not! Oh, in all things but this,  
I know how full of fears a woman is,  
And faint at need, and shrinking from the light  
Of battle : but once spoil her of her right  
In man's love, and there moves, I warn thee well,  
No bloodier spirit between heaven and hell.

#### LEADER.

I will betray thee not. It is but just,  
Thou smite him.—And that weeping in the dust  
And stormy tears, how should I blame them? . . .

Stay :

'Tis Creon, lord of Corinth, makes his way  
Hither, and bears, methinks, some word of weight.

*Enter from the right CREON, the King, with armed Attendants.*

CREON.

Thou woman sullen-eyed and hot with hate  
Against thy lord, Medea, I here command  
That thou and thy two children from this land  
Go forth to banishment. Make no delay :  
Seeing ourselves, the King, are come this day  
To see our charge fulfilled ; nor shall again  
Look homeward ere we have led thy children twain  
And thee beyond our realm's last boundary.

MEDEA.

Lost ! Lost !

Mine haters at the helm with sail flung free  
Pursuing ; and for us no beach nor shore  
In the endless waters ! . . . Yet, though stricken sore,  
I still will ask thee, for what crime, what thing  
Unlawful, wilt thou cast me out, O King ?

CREON.

What crime ? I fear thee, woman—little need  
To cloak my reasons—lest thou work some deed  
Of darkness on my child. And in that fear  
Reasons enough have part. Thou comest here  
A wise-woman confessed, and full of lore  
In unknown ways of evil. Thou art sore  
In heart, being parted from thy lover's arms.  
And more, thou hast made menace . . . so the  
alarms

But now have reached mine ear . . . on bride and groom,

And him who gave the bride, to work thy doom  
Of vengeance. Which, ere yet it be too late,  
I sweep aside. I choose to earn thine hate  
Of set will now, not palter with the mood  
Of mercy, and hereafter weep in blood.

MEDEA.

'Tis not the first nor second time, O King,  
That fame hath hurt me, and come nigh to bring  
My ruin. . . . How can any man, whose eyes  
Are wholesome, seek to rear his children wise  
Beyond men's wont? Much helplessness in arts  
Of common life, and in their townsmen's hearts  
Envy deep-set . . . so much their learning brings!  
Come unto fools with knowledge of new things,  
They deem it vanity, not knowledge. Aye,  
And men that erst for wisdom were held high,  
Feel thee a thorn to fret them, privily  
Held higher than they. So hath it been with me.  
A wise-woman I am; and for that sin  
To divers ill names men would pen me in;  
A seed of strife; an eastern dreamer; one  
Of brand not theirs; one hard to play upon . . .  
Ah, I am not so wondrous wise!—And now,  
To thee, I am terrible! What fearest thou?  
What dire deed? Do I tread so proud a path—  
Fear me not thou!—that I should brave the wrath  
Of princes? Thou: what hast thou ever done  
To wrong me? Granted thine own child to one  
Whom thy soul chose.—Ah, *him* out of my heart  
I hate; but thou, meseems, hast done thy part

Not ill. And for thine houses' happiness  
I hold no grudge. Go : marry, and God bless  
Your issues. Only suffer me to rest  
Somewhere within this land. Though sore oppressed,  
I will be still, knowing mine own defeat.

CREON.

Thy words be gentle : but I fear me yet  
Lest even now there creep some wickedness  
Deep hid within thee. And for that the less  
I trust thee now than ere these words began.  
A woman quick of wrath, aye, or a man,  
Is easier watching than the cold and still.

Up, straight, and find thy road ! Mock not my will  
With words. This doom is passed beyond recall ;  
Nor all thy crafts shall help thee, being withal  
My manifest foe, to linger at my side.

MEDEA (*suddenly throwing herself down and  
clinging to CREON*).

Oh, by thy knees ! By that new-wedded bride . . .

CREON.

'Tis waste of words. Thou shalt not weaken me.

MEDEA.

Wilt hunt me ? Spurn me when I kneel to thee ?

CREON.

'Tis mine own house that kneels to me, not thou.

MEDEA.

Home, my lost home, how I desire thee now !

CREON.

And I mine, and my child, beyond all things.

MEDEA.

O Loves of man, what curse is on your wings !

CREON.

Blessing or curse, 'tis as their chances flow.

MEDEA.

Remember, Zeus, the cause of all this woe !

CREON.

Oh, rid me of my pains ! Up, get thee gone !

MEDEA.

What would I with thy pains ? I have mine own.

CREON.

Up : or, 'fore God, my soldiers here shall fling . . .

MEDEA.

Not that ! Not that ! . . . I do but pray, O King . . .

CREON.

Thou wilt not? I must face the harsher task?

MEDEA.

I accept mine exile. 'Tis not that I ask.

CREON.

Why then so wild? Why clinging to mine hand?

MEDEA (*rising*).

For one day only leave me in thy land  
At peace, to find some counsel, ere the strain  
Of exile fall, some comfort for these twain,  
Mine innocents; since others take no thought,  
It seems, to save the babes that they begot.

Ah! Thou wilt pity them! Thou also art  
A father: thou hast somewhere still a heart  
That feels. . . . I reckon not of myself: 'tis they  
That break me, fallen upon so dire a day.

CREON.

Mine is no tyrant's mood. Aye, many a time  
Ere this my tenderness hath marred the chime  
Of wisest counsels. And I know that now  
I do mere folly. But so be it! Thou  
Shalt have this grace . . . But this I warn thee clear,  
If once the morrow's sunlight find thee here  
Within my borders, thee or child of thine,  
Thou diest! . . . Of this judgment not a line

Shall waver nor abate. So linger on,  
 If thou needs must, till the next risen sun ;  
 No further. . . . In one day there scarce can be  
 Those perils wrought whose dread yet haunteth me.

[*Exit CREON with his suite.*]

### CHORUS.

O woman, woman of sorrow,  
 Where wilt thou turn and flee ?  
 What town shall be thine to-morrow,  
 What land of all lands that be,  
 What door of a strange man's home ?  
 Yea, God hath hunted thee,  
 Medea, forth to the foam  
 Of a trackless sea.

### MEDEA.

Defeat on every side ; what else ?—But Oh,  
 Not here the end is : think it not ! I know  
 For bride and groom one battle yet untried,  
 And goodly pains for him that gave the bride.

Dost dream I would have grovelled to this man,  
 Save that I won mine end, and shaped my plan  
 For merry deeds ? My lips had never deigned  
 Speak word with him : my flesh been never stained  
 With touching. . . . Fool, Oh, triple fool ! It lay  
 So plain for him to kill my whole essay  
 By exile swift : and, lo, he sets me free  
 This one long day : wherein mine haters three  
 Shall lie here dead, the father and the bride  
 And husband—mine, not hers ! Oh, I have tried



So many thoughts of murder to my turn,  
 I know not which best likes me. Shall I burn  
 Their house with fire? Or stealing past unseen  
 To Jason's bed—I have a blade made keen  
 For that—stab, breast to breast, that wedded pair?  
 Good, but for one thing. When I am taken there,  
 And killed, they will laugh loud who hate me. . . .  
 Nay,

I love the old way best, the simple way  
 Of poison, where we too are strong as men.  
 Ah me!

And they being dead—what place shall hold me then?  
 What friend shall rise, with land inviolate  
 And trusty doors, to shelter from their hate  
 This flesh? . . . None anywhere! . . . A little  
 more

I needs must wait: and, if there ope some door  
 Of refuge, some strong tower to shield me, good:  
 In craft and darkness I will hunt this blood.  
 Else, if mine hour be come and no hope nigh,  
 Then sword in hand, full-willed and sure to die,  
 I yet will live to slay them. I will wend  
 Man-like, their road of daring to the end.

So help me She who of all Gods hath been  
 The best to me, of all my chosen queen  
 And helpmate, Hecatê, who dwells apart,  
 The flame of flame, in my fire's inmost heart:  
 For all their strength, they shall not stab my soul  
 And laugh thereafter! Dark and full of dole  
 Their bridal feast shall be, most dark the day  
 They joined their hands, and hunted me away.

Awake thee now, Medea! Whatso plot  
 Thou hast, or cunning, strive and falter not.

On to the peril-point ! Now comes the strain  
Of daring. Shall they trample thee again ?  
How ? And with Hellas laughing o'er thy fall  
While this thief's daughter weds, and weds withal  
Jason ? . . . A true king was thy father, yea,  
And born of the ancient Sun ! . . . Thou know'st  
the way ;  
And God hath made thee woman, things most vain  
For help, but wondrous in the paths of pain.  
[MEDEA goes into the House.]

## CHORUS.

Back streams the wave on the ever-running river :  
Life, life is changed and the laws of it o'ertrod.  
Man shall be the slave, the affrighted, the low-liver !  
Man hath forgotten God.  
And woman, yea, woman, shall be terrible in story :  
The tales too, meseemeth, shall be other than of  
yore.  
For a fear there is that cometh out of Woman and a  
glory,  
And the hard hating voices shall encompass her no  
more !  
  
The old bards shall cease, and their memory that  
lingers  
Of frail brides and faithless, shall be shrivelled as  
with fire.  
For they loved us not, nor knew us : and our lips were  
dumb, our fingers  
Could wake not the secret of the lyre.

Else, else, O God the Singer, I had sung amid their  
rages

A long tale of Man and his deeds for good and  
ill.

But the old World knoweth—'tis the speech of all  
his ages—

Man's wrong and ours : he knoweth and is still.

*Some Women.*

Forth from thy father's home

Thou camest, O heart of fire,

To the Dark Blue Rocks, to the clashing foam,

To the seas of thy desire :

Till the Dark Blue Bar was crossed ;

And, lo, by an alien river

Standing, thy lover lost,

Void-armed for ever,

Forth yet again, O lowest

Of landless women, a ranger

Of desolate ways, thou goest,

From the walls of the stranger.

*Others.*

And the great Oath waxeth weak ;

And Ruth, as a thing outstriven,

Is fled, fled, from the shores of the Greek,

Away on the winds of heaven.

Dark is the house afar,  
Where an old king called thee daughter ;  
All that was once thy star  
In stormy water,

Dark : and, lo, in the nearer  
House that was sworn to love thee,  
Another, queenlier, dearer,  
Is thronèd above thee.

*Enter from the right* JASON.

JASON.

Oft have I seen, in other days than these,  
How a dark temper maketh maladies  
No friend can heal. 'Twas easy to have kept  
Both land and home. It needed but to accept  
Unstrivingly the pleasure of our lords.  
But thou, for mere delight in stormy words,  
Wilt lose all ! . . . Now thy speech provokes not me.  
Rail on. Of all mankind let Jason be  
Most evil ; none shall check thee. But for these  
Dark threats cast out against the majesties  
Of Corinth, count as veriest gain thy path  
Of exile. I myself, when princely wrath  
Was hot against thee, strove with all good will  
To appease the wrath, and wished to keep thee still  
Beside me. But thy mouth would never stay  
From vanity, blaspheming night and day  
Our masters. Therefore thou shalt fly the land.  
Yet, even so, I will not hold my hand  
From succouring mine own people. Here am I  
To help thee, woman, pondering heedfully

Thy new state. For I would not have thee flung  
Provisionless away—aye, and the young  
Children as well ; nor lacking aught that will  
Of mine can bring thee. Many a lesser ill  
Hangs on the heels of exile. . . . Aye, and though  
Thou hate me, dream not that my heart can know  
Or fashion aught of angry will to thee.

## MEDEA.

Evil, most evil ! . . . since thou grantest me  
That comfort, the worst weapon left me now  
To smite a coward. . . . Thou comest to me, thou,  
Mine enemy ! (*Turning to the CHORUS.*) Oh, say,  
how call ye this,  
To face, and smile, the comrade whom his kiss  
Betrayed ? Scorn ? Insult ? Courage ? None of  
these :

'Tis but of all man's inward sicknesses  
The vilest, that he knoweth not of shame  
Nor pity ! Yet I praise him that he came . . .  
To me it shall bring comfort, once to clear  
My heart on thee, and thou shalt wince to hear.

I will begin with that, 'twixt me and thee,  
That first befell. I saved thee. I saved thee—  
Let thine own Greeks be witness, every one  
That sailed on Argo—saved thee, sent alone  
To yoke with yokes the bulls of fiery breath,  
And sow that Acre of the Lords of Death ;  
And mine own ancient Serpent, who did keep  
The Golden Fleece, the eyes that knew not sleep,  
And shining coils, him also did I smite  
Dead for thy sake, and lifted up the light

That bade thee live. Myself, uncounsellèd,  
 Stole forth from father and from home, and fled  
 Where dark Iôlcos under Pelion lies,  
 With thee—Oh, single-hearted more than wise !  
 I murdered Pelias, yea, in agony,  
 By his own daughters' hands, for sake of thee ;  
 I swept their house like War.—And hast thou then  
 Accepted all—O evil yet again !—  
 And cast me off and taken thee for bride  
 Another ? And with children at thy side !  
 One could forgive a childless man. But no :  
 I have borne thee children . . .

Is sworn faith so low

And weak a thing ? I understand it not.  
 Are the old gods dead ? Are the old laws forgot,  
 And new laws made ? Since not my passioning,  
 But thine own heart, doth cry thee for a thing  
 Forsworn.

*[She catches sight of her own hand which she  
 has thrown out to denounce him.]*

Poor, poor right hand of mine, whom he  
 Did cling to, and these knees, so cravingly,  
 We are unclean, thou and I ; we have caught the stain  
 Of bad men's flesh . . . and dreamed our dreams in  
 vain.

Thou comest to befriend me ? Give me, then,  
 Thy counsel. 'Tis not that I dream again  
 For good from thee : but, questioned, thou wilt show  
 The viler. Say : now whither shall I go ?  
 Back to my father ? Him I did betray,  
 And all his land, when we two fled away.  
 To those poor Peliad maids ? For them 'twere good  
 To take me in, who spilled their father's blood. . . .

Aye, so my whole life stands ! There were at home  
Who loved me well : to them I am become  
A curse. And the first friends who sheltered me,  
Whom most I should have spared, to pleasure thee  
I have turned to foes. Oh, therefore hast thou laid  
My crown upon me, blest of many a maid  
In Hellas, now I have won what all did crave,  
Thee, the world-wondered lover and the brave ;  
Who this day looks and sees me banished, thrown  
Away with these two babes, all, all, alone . . .  
Oh, merry mocking when the lamps are red :  
“Where go the bridegroom’s babes to beg their bread  
In exile, and the woman who gave all  
To save him ?”

O great God, shall gold withal  
Bear thy clear mark, to sift the base and fine,  
And o’er man’s living visage runs no sign  
To show the lie within, ere all too late ?

## LEADER.

Dire and beyond all healing is the hate  
When hearts that loved are turned to enmity.

## JASON.

In speech at least, meseemeth, I must be  
Not evil ; but, as some old pilot goes  
Furled to his sail’s last edge, when danger blows  
Too fiery, run before the wind and swell,  
Woman, of thy loud storms.—And thus I tell  
My tale. Since thou wilt build so wondrous high  
Thy deeds of service in my jeopardy,

To all my crew and quest I know but one  
 Saviour, of Gods or mortals one alone,  
 The Cyprian. Oh, thou hast both brain and wit,  
 Yet underneath . . . nay, all the tale of it  
 Were graceless telling ; how sheer love, a fire  
 Of poison-shafts, compelled thee with desire  
 To save me. But enough. I will not score  
 That count too close. 'Twas good help : and there-  
 for

I give thee thanks, howe'er the help was wrought.  
 Howbeit, in my deliverance, thou hast got  
 Far more than given. A good Greek land hath  
 been

Thy lasting home, not barbary. Thou hast seen  
 Our ordered life, and justice, and the long  
 Still grasp of law not changing with the strong  
 Man's pleasure. Then, all Hellas far and near  
 Hath learned thy wisdom, and in every ear  
 Thy fame is. Had thy days run by unseen  
 On that last edge of the world, where then had been  
 The story of great Medea? Thou and I . . .  
 What worth to us were treasures heaped high  
 In rich kings' rooms ; what worth a voice of gold  
 More sweet than ever rang from Orpheus old,  
 Unless our deeds have glory ?

Speak I so,

Touching the Quest I wrought, thyself did throw  
 The challenge down. Next for thy cavilling  
 Of wrath at mine alliance with a king,  
 Here thou shalt see I both was wise, and free  
 From touch of passion, and a friend to thee  
 Most potent, and my children . . . Nay, be still !  
 When first I stood in Corinth, clogged with ill



From many a desperate mischance, what bliss  
Could I that day have dreamed of, like to this,  
To wed with a king's daughter, I exiled  
And beggared? Not—what makes thy passion  
wild—

From loathing of thy bed ; not over-fraught  
With love for this new bride ; not that I sought  
To upbuild mine house with offspring : 'tis enough,  
What thou hast borne : I make no word thereof :  
But, first and greatest, that we all might dwell  
In a fair house and want not, knowing well  
That poor men have no friends, but far and near  
Shunning and silence. Next, I sought to rear  
Our sons in nurture worthy of my race,  
And, raising brethren to them, in one place  
Join both my houses, and be all from now  
Prince-like and happy. What more need hast  
thou

Of children ? And for me, it serves my star  
To link in strength the children that now are  
With those that shall be.

Have I counselled ill ?  
Not thine own self would say it, couldst thou still  
One hour thy jealous flesh.—'Tis ever so !  
Who looks for more in women ? When the flow  
Of love runs plain, why, all the world is fair :  
But, once there fall some ill chance anywhere  
To baulk that thirst, down in swift hate are trod  
Men's dearest aims and noblest. Would to God  
We mortals by some other seed could raise  
Our fruits, and no blind women block our ways !  
Then had there been no curse to wreck man-  
kind.

## LEADER.

Lord Jason, very subtly hast thou twined  
Thy speech : but yet, though all athwart thy will  
I speak, this is not well thou dost, but ill,  
Betraying her who loved thee and was true.

## MEDEA.

Surely I have my thoughts, and not a few  
Have held me strange. To me it seemeth, when  
A crafty tongue is given to evil men  
'Tis like to wreck, not help them. Their own brain  
Tempts them with lies to dare and dare again,  
Till . . . no man hath enough of subtlety.  
As thou—be not so seeming-fair to me  
Nor deft of speech. One word will make thee fall.  
Wert thou not false, 'twas thine to tell me all,  
And charge me help thy marriage path, as I  
Did love thee ; not befool me with a lie.

## JASON.

An easy task had that been ! Aye, and thou  
A loving aid, who canst not, even now,  
Still that loud heart that surges like the tide !

## MEDEA.

That moved thee not. Thine old barbarian bride,  
The dog out of the east who loved thee sore,  
She grew grey-haired, she served thy pride no more.

JASON.

Now understand for once ! The girl to me  
Is nothing, in this web of sovranty  
I hold. I do but seek to save, even yet,  
Thee : and for brethren to our sons beget  
Young kings, to prosper all our lives again.

MEDEA.

God shelter me from prosperous days of pain,  
And wealth that maketh wounds about my heart.

JASON.

Wilt change that prayer, and choose a wiser part ?  
Pray not to hold true sense for pain, nor rate  
Thyself unhappy, being too fortunate.

MEDEA.

Aye, mock me ; thou hast where to lay thine head,  
But I go naked to mine exile.

JASON.

Tread  
Thine own path ! Thou hast made it all to be.

MEDEA.

How ? By seducing and forsaking thee ?

JASON.

By those vile curses on the royal halls  
Let loose. . . .

MEDEA.

On thy house also, as chance falls,  
I am a living curse.

JASON.

Oh, peace ! Enough  
Of these vain wars : I will no more thereof.  
If thou wilt take from all that I possess  
Aid for these babes and thine own helplessness  
Of exile, speak thy bidding. Here I stand  
Full-willed to succour thee with stintless hand,  
And send my signet to old friends that dwell  
On foreign shores, who will entreat thee well.  
Refuse, and thou shalt do a deed most vain.  
But cast thy rage away, and thou shalt gain  
Much, and lose little for thine anger's sake.

MEDEA.

I will not seek thy friends. I will not take  
Thy givings. Give them not. Fruits of a stem  
Unholy bring no blessing after them.

JASON.

Now God in heaven be witness, all my heart  
Is willing, in all ways, to do its part

For thee and for thy babes. But nothing good  
Can please thee. In sheer savageness of mood  
Thou drivest from thee every friend. Wherefore  
I warrant thee, thy pains shall be the more.

*[He goes slowly away.]*

## MEDEA.

Go : thou art weary for the new delight  
Thou wooest, so long tarrying out of sight  
Of her sweet chamber. Go, fulfil thy pride,  
O bridegroom ! For it may be, such a bride  
Shall wait thee,—yea, God heareth me in this—  
As thine own heart shall sicken ere it kiss.

---

## CHORUS.

Alas, the Love that falleth like a flood,  
Strong-winged and transitory :  
Why praise ye him ? What beareth he of good  
To man, or glory ?  
Yet Love there is that moves in gentleness,  
Heart-filling, sweetest of all powers that bless.  
Loose not on me, O Holder of man's heart,  
Thy golden quiver,  
Nor steep in poison of desire the dart  
That heals not ever.

The pent hate of the word that cavilleth,  
The strife that hath no fill,  
Where once was fondness ; and the mad heart's breath  
For strange love panting still :  
O Cyprian, cast me not on these ; but sift,  
Keen-eyed, of love the good and evil gift.

Make Innocence my friend, God's fairest star,  
 Yea, and abate not  
 The rare sweet beat of bosoms without war,  
 That love, and hate not.

*Others.*

Home of my heart, land of my own,  
 Cast me not, nay, for pity,  
 Out on my ways, helpless, alone,  
 Where the feet fail in the mire and stone,  
 A woman without a city.  
 Ah, not that! Better the end :  
 The green grave cover me rather,  
 If a break must come in the days I know,  
 And the skies be changed and the earth below ;  
 For the weariest road that man may wend  
 Is forth from the home of his father.

Lo, we have seen : 'tis not a song  
 Sung, nor learned of another.  
 For whom hast thou in thy direst wrong  
 For comfort ? Never a city strong  
 To hide thee, never a brother.  
 Ah, but the man—cursèd be he,  
 Cursèd beyond recover,  
 Who openeth, shattering, seal by seal,  
 A friend's clean heart, then turns his heel,  
 Deaf unto love : never in me  
 Friend shall he know nor lover.

*[While MEDEA is waiting downcast, seated upon her door-step, there passes from the left a traveller with followers. As he catches sight of MEDEA he stops*

ÆGEUS.

Have joy, Medea! 'Tis the homeliest  
Word that old friends can greet with, and the best.

MEDEA (*looking up, surprised*).

Oh, joy on thee, too, Ægeus, gentle king  
Of Athens!—But whence com'st thou journeying?

ÆGEUS.

From Delphi now and the old encavern'd stair. . . .

MEDEA.

Where Earth's heart speaks in song? What mad'st  
thou there?

ÆGEUS.

Prayed heaven for children—the same search always.

MEDEA.

Children? Ah God! Art childless to this day?

ÆGEUS.

So God hath willed. Childless and desolate.

MEDEA.

What word did Phœbus speak, to change thy fate?

ÆGEUS.

Riddles, too hard for mortal man to read.

MEDEA.

Which I may hear ?

ÆGEUS.

Assuredly : they need

A rarer wit.

MEDEA.

How said he ?

ÆGEUS.

Not to spill

Life's wine, nor seek for more. . . .

MEDEA.

Until ?

ÆGEUS.

Until

I tread the hearth-stone of my sires of yore.

MEDEA.

And what should bring thee here, by Creon's shore ?

ÆGEUS.

One Pittheus know'st thou, high lord of Trozên ?



MEDEA.

Aye, Pelops' son, a man most pure of sin.

ÆGEUS.

Him I would ask, touching Apollo's will.

MEDEA.

Much use in God's ways hath he, and much skill.

ÆGEUS.

And, long years back he was my battle-friend,  
The truest e'er man had.

MEDEA.

Well, may God send  
Good hap to thee, and grant all thy desire.

ÆGEUS.

But thou . . . ? Thy frame is wasted, and the fire  
Dead in thine eyes.

MEDEA.

Ægeus, my husband is  
The falsest man in the world.

ÆGEUS.

What word is this?  
Say clearly what thus makes thy visage dim?

MEDEA.

He is false to me, who never injured him.

AEGEUS.

What hath he done ? Show all, that I may see.

MEDEA.

Ta'en him a wife ; a wife, set over me  
To rule his house !

AEGEUS.

He hath not dared to do,  
Jason, a thing so shameful ?

MEDEA.

Aye, 'tis true :  
And those he loved of yore have no place now.

AEGEUS.

Some passion sweepeth him ? Or is it thou  
He turns from ?

MEDEA.

Passion, passion to betray  
His dearest !

AEGEUS.

Shame be his, so fallen away  
From honour !

MEDEA.

Passion to be near a throne,  
A king's heir !

AEGEUS.

How, who gives the bride ? Say on.

MEDEA.

Creon, who o'er all Corinth standeth chief.

AEGEUS.

Woman, thou hast indeed much cause for grief.

MEDEA.

'Tis ruin.—And they have cast me out as well.

AEGEUS.

Who ? 'Tis a new wrong this, and terrible.

MEDEA.

Creon the king, from every land and shore. . . .

AEGEUS.

And Jason suffers him ? Oh, 'tis too sore !

## MEDEA.

He loveth to bear bravely ills like these !

But, Aegeus, by thy beard, oh, by thy knees,  
I pray thee, and I give me for thine own,  
Thy suppliant, pity me ! Oh, pity one  
So miserable. Thou never wilt stand there  
And see me cast out friendless to despair.  
Give me a home in Athens . . . by the fire  
Of thine own hearth ! Oh, so may thy desire  
Of children be fulfilled of God, and thou  
Die happy ! . . . Thou canst know not ; even now  
Thy prize is won ! I, I will make of thee  
A childless man no more. The seed shall be,  
I swear it, sown. Such magic herbs I know.

## AEGEUS.

Woman, indeed my heart goes forth to show  
This help to thee, first for religion's sake,  
Then for thy promised hope, to heal my ache  
Of childlessness. 'Tis this hath made mine whole  
Life as a shadow, and starved out my soul.  
But thus it stands with me. Once make thy way  
To Attic earth, I, as in law I may,  
Will keep thee and befriend. But in this land,  
Where Creon rules, I may not raise my hand  
To shelter thee. Move of thine own essay  
To seek my house, there thou shalt alway stay,  
Inviolatè, never to be seized again.  
But come thyself from Corinth. I would fain  
Even in foreign eyes be alway just.

MEDEA.

'Tis well. Give me an oath wherein to trust  
And all that man could ask thou hast granted me.

AEGEUS.

Dost trust me not? Or what thing troubleth thee?

MEDEA.

I trust thee. But so many, far and near,  
Do hate me—all King Pelias' house, and here  
Creon. Once bound by oaths and sanctities  
Thou canst not yield me up for such as these  
To drag from Athens. But a spoken word,  
No more, to bind thee, which no God hath heard. . . .  
The embassies, methinks, would come and go :  
They all are friends to thee. . . . Ah me, I know  
Thou wilt not list to me ! So weak am I,  
And they full-filled with gold and majesty.

AEGEUS.

Methinks 'tis a far foresight, this thine oath.  
Still, if thou so wilt have it, nothing loath  
Am I to serve thee. Mine own hand is so  
The stronger, if I have this plea to show  
Thy persecutors : and for thee withal  
The bond more sure.—On what God shall I call?

MEDEA.

Swear by the Earth thou treadest, by the Sun,  
Sire of my sires, and all the gods as one. . . .

ÆGEUS.

To do what thing or not do? Make all plain.

MEDEA.

Never thyself to cast me out again.  
Nor let another, whatsoe'er his plea,  
Take me, while thou yet livest and art free.

ÆGEUS.

Never : so hear me, Earth, and the great star  
Of daylight, and all other gods that are !

MEDEA.

'Tis well : and if thou falter from thy vow . . . ?

ÆGEUS.

God's judgment on the godless break my brow !

MEDEA.

Go ! Go thy ways rejoicing.—All is bright  
And clear before me. Go : and ere the night  
Myself will follow, when the deed is done  
I purpose, and the end I thirst for won.

[ÆGEUS and his train depart.]

## CHORUS.

Farewell : and Maia's guiding Son  
Back lead thee to thy hearth and fire,  
Aegeus ; and all the long desire  
That wasteth thee, at last be won :  
Our eyes have seen thee as thou art,  
A gentle and a righteous heart.

## MEDEA.

God, and God's Justice, and ye blinding Skies !  
At last the victory dawneth ! Yea, mine eyes  
See, and my foot is on the mountain's brow.  
Mine enemies ! Mine enemies, oh, now  
Atonement cometh ! Here at my worst hour  
A friend is found, a very port of power  
To save my shipwreck. Here will I make fast  
Mine anchor, and escape them at the last  
In Athens' wallèd hill.—But ere the end  
'Tis meet I show thee all my counsel, friend :  
Take it, no tale to make men laugh withal !

Straightway to Jason I will send some thrall  
To entreat him to my presence. Comes he here,  
Then with soft reasons will I feed his ear,  
How his will now is my will, how all things  
Are well, touching this marriage-bed of kings  
For which I am betrayed—all wise and rare  
And profitable ! Yet will I make one prayer,  
That my two children be no more exiled  
But stay. . . . Oh, not that I would leave a child

Here upon angry shores till those have laughed  
Who hate me : 'tis that I will slay by craft  
The king's daughter. With gifts they shall be sent,  
Gifts to the bride to spare their banishment,  
Fine robings and a carcanet of gold.  
Which raiment let her once but take, and fold  
About her, a foul death that girl shall die  
And all who touch her in her agony.

Such poison shall they drink, my robe and wreath !

Howbeit, of that no more. I gnash my teeth  
Thinking on what a path my feet must tread  
Thereafter. I shall lay those children dead—  
Mine, whom no hand shall steal from me away !  
Then, leaving Jason childless, and the day  
As night above him, I will go my road  
To exile, flying, flying from the blood  
Of these my best-beloved, and having wrought  
All horror, so but one thing reach me not,  
The laugh of them that hate us.

Let it come !

What profits life to me ? I have no home,  
No country now, nor shield from any wrong.  
That was my evil hour, when down the long  
Halls of my father out I stole, my will  
Chained by a Greek man's voice, who still, oh, still,  
If God yet live, shall all requited be.  
For never child of mine shall Jason see  
Hereafter living, never child beget  
From his new bride, who this day, desolate  
Even as she made me desolate, shall die  
Shrieking amid my poisons. . . . Names have I  
Among your folk ? One light ? One weak of hand ?  
An eastern dreamer ?—Nay, but with the brand



Of strange suns burnt, my hate, by God above,  
A perilous thing, and passing sweet my love !  
For these it is that make life glorious.

LEADER.

Since thou hast bared thy fell intent to us  
I, loving thee, and helping in their need  
Man's laws, adjure thee, dream not of this deed !

MEDEA.

There is no other way.—I pardon thee  
Thy littleness, who art not wronged like me.

LEADER.

Thou canst not kill the fruit thy body bore !

MEDEA.

Yes : if the man I hate be pained the more.

LEADER.

And thou made miserable, most miserable ?

MEDEA.

Oh, let it come ! All words of good or ill  
Are wasted now.

*[She claps her hands : the NURSE comes out  
from the house.]*

Ho, woman ; get thee gone  
And lead lord Jason hither. . . . There is none

Like thee, to work me these high services.  
But speak no word of what my purpose is,  
As thou art faithful, thou, and bold to try  
All succours, and a woman even as I !

[*The NURSE departs.*]

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CHORUS.

The sons of Erechtheus, the olden,  
Whom high gods planted of yore  
In an old land of heaven upholden,  
A proud land untrodden of war :  
They are hungered, and, lo, their desire  
With wisdom is fed as with meat :  
In their skies is a shining of fire,  
A joy in the fall of their feet :  
And thither, with manifold dowers,  
From the North, from the hills, from the morn,  
The Muses did gather their powers,  
That a child of the Nine should be born ;  
And Harmony, sown as the flowers,  
Grew gold in the acres of corn.

And Cephîsus, the fair-flowing river—  
The Cyprian dipping her hand  
Hath drawn of his dew, and the shiver  
Of her touch is as joy in the land.  
For her breathing in fragrance is written,  
And in music her path as she goes,  
And the cloud of her hair, it is litten  
With stars of the wind-woven rose.  
So fareth she ever and ever,  
And forth of her bosom is blown,

As dews on the winds of the river,  
An hunger of passions unknown,  
Strong Loves of all godlike endeavour,  
Whom Wisdom shall throne on her throne.

*Some Women.*

But Cephîsus the fair-flowing,  
Will he bear thee on his shore ?  
Shall the land that succours all, succour thee,  
Who art foul among thy kind,  
With the tears of children blind ?  
Dost thou see the red gash growing,  
Thine own burden dost thou see ?  
Every side, Every way,  
Lo, we kneel to thee and pray :  
By thy knees, by thy soul, O woman wild !  
One at least thou canst not slay,  
Not thy child !

*Others.*

Hast thou ice that thou shalt bind it  
To thy breast, and make thee dead  
To thy children, to thine own spirit's pain ?  
When the hand knows what it dares,  
When thine eyes look into theirs,  
Shalt thou keep by tears unblinded  
Thy dividing of the slain ?  
These be deeds Not for thee :  
These be things that cannot be !  
Thy babes—though thine hardihood be fell,  
When they cling about thy knee,  
'Twill be well !

*Enter JASON.*

JASON.

I answer to thy call. Though full of hate  
Thou be, I yet will not so far abate  
My kindness for thee, nor refuse mine ear.  
Say in what new desire thou hast called me here.

MEDEA.

Jason, I pray thee, for my words but now  
Spoken, forgive me. My bad moods. . . . Oh, thou  
At least wilt strive to bear with them ! There be  
Many old deeds of love 'twixt me and thee.  
Lo, I have reasoned with myself apart  
And chidden : "Why must I be mad, O heart  
Of mine : and raging against one whose word  
Is wisdom : making me a thing abhorred  
To them that rule the land, and to mine own  
Husband, who doth but that which, being done,  
Will help us all—to wed a queen, and get  
Young kings for brethren to my sons ? And yet  
I rage alone, and cannot quit my rage—  
What aileth me ?—when God sends harbourage  
So simple ? Have I not my children ? Know  
I not we are but exiles, and must go  
Beggared and friendless else ?" Thought upon  
thought  
So pressed me, till I knew myself full-fraught  
With bitterness of heart and blinded eyes.  
So now—I give thee thanks : and hold thee wise

To have caught this anchor for our aid. The fool  
Was I ; who should have been thy friend, thy tool ;  
Gone wooing with thee, stood at thy bed-side  
Serving, and welcomed duteously thy bride.  
But, as we are, we are—I will not say  
Mere evil—women ! Why must thou to-day  
Turn strange, and make thee like some evil thing,  
Childish, to meet my childish passioning ?  
See, I surrender : and confess that then  
I had bad thoughts, but now have turned again  
And found my wiser mind. [*She claps her hands.*

Ho, children ! Run  
Quickly ! Come hither, out into the sun,  
[*The CHILDREN come from the house, followed  
by their ATTENDANT.*

And greet your father. Welcome him with us,  
And throw quite, quite away, as mother does,  
Your anger against one so dear. Our peace  
Is made, and all the old bad war shall cease  
For ever.—Go, and take his hand. . . .

[*As the CHILDREN go to JASON, she suddenly  
bursts into tears. The CHILDREN quickly  
return to her : she recovers herself, smiling  
amid her tears.*

Ah me,  
I am full of hidden horrors ! . . . Shall it be  
A long time more, my children, that ye live  
To reach to me those dear, dear arms ? . . . Forgive !  
I am so ready with my tears to-day,  
And full of dread. . . . I sought to smooth away  
The long strife with your father, and, lo, now  
I have all drowned with tears this little brow !

[*She wipes the child's face.*

## LEADER.

O'er mine eyes too there stealeth a pale tear :  
Let the evil rest, O God, let it rest here !

## JASON.

Woman, indeed I praise thee now, nor say  
Ill of thine other hour. 'Tis nature's way,  
A woman needs must stir herself to wrath,  
When work of marriage by so strange a path  
Crosseth her lord. But thou, thine heart doth  
wend

The happier road. Thou hast seen, ere quite the  
end,

What choice must needs be stronger : which to do  
Shows a wise-minded woman. . . . And for you,  
Children ; your father never has forgot  
Your needs. If God but help him, he hath wrought  
A strong deliverance for your weakness. Yea,  
I think you, with your brethren, yet one day  
Shall be the mightiest voices in this land.  
Do you grow tall and strong. Your father's hand  
Guideth all else, and whatso power divine  
Hath alway helped him. . . . Ah, may it be mine  
To see you yet in manhood, stern of brow,  
Strong-armed, set high o'er those that hate me. . . .

How ?

Woman, thy face is turned. Thy cheek is swept  
With pallor of strange tears. Dost not accept  
Gladly and of good will my benisons ?

MEDEA.

'Tis nothing. Thinking of these little ones. . . .

JASON.

Take heart, then. I will guard them from all ill.

MEDEA.

I do take heart. Thy word I never will  
Mistrust. Alas, a woman's bosom bears  
But woman's courage, a thing born for tears.

JASON.

What ails thee?—All too sore thou weepest there.

MEDEA.

I was their mother! When I heard thy prayer  
Of long life for them, there swept over me  
A horror, wondering how these things shall be.

But for the matter of my need that thou  
Should speak with me, part I have said, and now  
Will finish.—Seeing it is the king's behest  
To cast me out from Corinth . . . aye, and best,  
Far best, for me—I know it—not to stay  
Longer to trouble thee and those who sway  
The realm, being held to all their house a foe. . . .  
Behold, I spread my sails, and meekly go

To exile. But our children. . . . Could this land  
Be still their home awhile : could thine own hand  
But guide their boyhood. . . . Seek the king, and  
    pray  
His pity, that he bid thy children stay !

JASON.

He is hard to move. Yet surely 'twere well done.

MEDEA.

Bid her—for thy sake, for a daughter's boon. . . .

JASON.

Well thought ! Her I can fashion to my mind.

MEDEA.

Surely. She is a woman like her kind. . . .  
Yet I will aid thee in thy labour ; I  
Will send her gifts, the fairest gifts that lie  
In the hands of men, things of the days of old,  
Fine robings and a carcanet of gold,  
By the boys' hands.—Go, quick, some handmaiden,  
And fetch the raiment.

*[A handmaid goes into the house.]*

Ah, her cup shall then  
Be filled indeed ! What more should woman crave,  
Being wed with thee, the bravest of the brave,



And girt with raiment which of old the sire  
Of all my house, the Sun, gave, steeped in fire,  
To his own fiery race?

*[The handmaid has returned bearing the Gifts.]*

Come, children, lift  
With heed these caskets. Bear them as your gift  
To her, being bride and princess and of right  
Blessed!—I think she will not hold them light.

JASON.

Fond woman, why wilt empty thus thine hand  
Of treasure? Doth King Creon's castle stand  
In stint of raiment, or in stint of gold?  
Keep these, and make no gift. For if she hold  
Jason of any worth at all, I swear  
Chattels like these will not weigh more with her.

MEDEA.

Ah, chide me not! 'Tis written, gifts persuade  
The gods in heaven; and gold is stronger made  
Than words innumerable to bend men's ways.  
Fortune is hers. God maketh great her days:  
Young and a crown'd queen! And banishment  
For those two babes. . . . I would not gold were  
spent,  
But life's blood, ere that come.

My children, go  
Forth into those rich halls, and, bowing low,  
Beseech your father's bride, whom I obey,  
Ye be not, of her mercy, cast away

Exiled : and give the caskets—above all  
Mark this !—to none but her, to hold withal  
And keep. . . . Go quick ! And let your mother  
know

Soon the good tiding that she longs for. . . . Go !

*[She goes quickly into the house. JASON and  
the CHILDREN with their ATTENDANT  
depart.]*

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CHORUS.

Now I have no hope more of the children's living ;  
No hope more. They are gone forth unto death.  
The bride, she taketh the poison of their giving :  
She taketh the bounden gold and openeth ;  
And the crown, the crown, she lifteth about her brow,  
Where the light brown curls are clustering. No  
hope now !

O sweet and cloudy gleam of the garments golden !  
The robe, it hath clasped her breast and the crown  
her head.  
Then, then, she decketh the bride, as a bride of  
olden  
Story, that goeth pale to the kiss of the dead.  
For the ring hath closed, and the portion of death  
is there ;  
And she flieth not, but perisheth unaware.

*Some Women.*

O bridegroom, bridegroom of the kiss so cold,  
Art thou wed with princes, art thou girt with gold,

Who know'st not, suing  
For thy child's undoing,  
And, on her thou lovest, for a doom untold?  
How art thou fallen from thy place of old!

*Others.*

O Mother, Mother, what hast thou to reap,  
When the harvest cometh, between wake and sleep?  
For a heart unslaken,  
For a troth forsaken,  
Lo, babes that call thee from a bloody deep:  
And thy love returns not. Get thee forth and weep!  
[Enter the ATTENDANT with the two  
CHILDREN: MEDEA comes out from  
the house.]

ATTENDANT.

Mistress, these children from their banishment  
Are spared. The royal bride hath mildly bent  
Her hand to accept thy gifts, and all is now  
Peace for the children.—Ha, why standest thou  
Confounded, when good fortune draweth near?

MEDEA.

Ah God!

ATTENDANT.

This chimes not with the news I bear.

MEDEA.

O God, have mercy!

ATTENDANT.

Is some word of wrath  
Here hidden that I knew not of? And hath  
My hope to give thee joy so cheated me?

MEDEA.

Thou givest what thou givest : I blame not thee.

ATTENDANT.

Thy brows are all o'ercast : thine eyes are filled. . . .

MEDEA.

For bitter need, Old Man ! The gods have willed,  
And mine own evil mind, that this should come.

ATTENDANT.

Take heart ! Thy sons one day will bring thee home.

MEDEA.

Home ? . . . I have others to send home. Woe's me !

ATTENDANT.

Be patient. Many a mother before thee  
Hath parted from her children. We poor things  
Of men must needs endure what fortune brings.

## MEDEA.

I will endure.—Go thou within, and lay  
All ready that my sons may need to-day.

[*The ATTENDANT goes into the house.*]

O children, children mine : and you have found  
A land and home, where, leaving me discrowned  
And desolate, for ever you will stay,  
Motherless children ! And I go my way  
To other lands, an exile, ere you bring  
Your fruits home, ere I see you prospering  
Or know your brides, or deck the bridal bed,  
All flowers, and lift your torches overhead.

Oh, cursèd be mine own hard heart ! 'Twas all  
In vain, then, that I reared you up, so tall  
And fair ; in vain I bore you, and was torn  
With those long pitiless pains, when you were  
born.

Ah, wondrous hopes my poor heart had in you,  
How you would tend me in mine age, and do  
The shroud about me with your own dear hands,  
When I lay cold, blessèd in all the lands  
That knew us. And that gentle thought is dead !  
You go, and I live on, to eat the bread  
Of long years, to myself most full of pain.  
And never your dear eyes, never again,  
Shall see your mother, far away being thrown  
To other shapes of life. . . . My babes, my own,  
Why gaze ye so ?—What is it that ye see ?—  
And laugh with that last laughter ? . . . Woe is me,  
What shall I do ?

Women, my strength is gone,  
Gone like a dream, since once I looked upon

Those shining faces. . . . I can do it not.  
 Good-bye to all the thoughts that burned so hot  
 Aforetime ! I will take and hide them far,  
 Far, from men's eyes. Why should I seek a war  
 So blind : by these babes' wounds to sting again  
 Their father's heart, and win myself a pain  
 Twice deeper ? Never, never ! I forget  
 Henceforward all I laboured for.

And yet,  
 What is it with me ? Would I be a thing  
 Mocked at, and leave mine enemies to sting  
 Unsmitten ? It must be. O coward heart,  
 Ever to harbour such soft words !—Depart  
 Out of my sight, ye twain. [*The CHILDREN go in.*]

And they whose eyes  
 Shall hold it sin to share my sacrifice,  
 On their heads be it ! My hand shall swerve not  
 now.

Ah, Ah, thou Wrath within me ! Do not thou,  
 Do not. . . . Down, down, thou tortured thing, and  
 spare  
 My children ! They will dwell with us, aye, there  
 Far off, and give thee peace.

Too late, too late !  
 By all Hell's living agonies of hate,  
 They shall not take my little ones alive  
 To make their mock with ! Howsoe'er I strive  
 The thing is doomed ; it shall not escape now  
 From being. Aye, the crown is on the brow,  
 And the robe girt, and in the robe that high  
 Queen dying.

I know all. Yet . . . seeing that I

Must go so long a journey, and these twain  
 A longer yet and darker, I would fain  
 Speak with them, ere I go.

*[A handmaid brings the CHILDREN out again.]*

Come, children ; stand  
 A little from me. There. Reach out your hand,  
 Your right hand—so—to mother : and good-bye !

*[She has kept them hitherto at arm's-length :  
 but at the touch of their hands, her resolu-  
 tion breaks down, and she gathers them  
 passionately into her arms.]*

Oh, darling hand ! Oh, darling mouth, and eye,  
 And royal mien, and bright brave faces clear,  
 May you be blessed, but not here ! What here  
 Was yours, your father stole. . . . Ah God, the glow  
 Of cheek on cheek, the tender touch ; and Oh,  
 Sweet scent of childhood. . . . Go ! Go ! . . . Am I  
 blind ? . . .

Mine eyes can see not, when I look to find  
 Their places. I am broken by the wings  
 Of evil. . . . Yea, I know to what bad things  
 I go, but louder than all thought doth cry  
 Anger, which maketh man's worst misery.

*[She follows the CHILDREN into the house.]*

#### CHORUS.

My thoughts have roamed a cloudy land,  
 And heard a fierier music fall  
 Than woman's heart should stir withal :  
 And yet some Muse majestic,  
 Unknown, hath hold of woman's hand,  
 Seeking for Wisdom—not in all :

A feeble seed, a scattered band,  
Thou yet shalt find in lonely places,  
Not dead amongst us, nor our faces  
Turned away from the Muses' call.

And thus my thought would speak : that she  
Who ne'er hath borne a child nor known  
Is nearer to felicity :  
Unlit she goeth and alone,  
With little understanding what  
A child's touch means of joy or woe,  
And many toils she beareth not.

But they within whose garden fair  
That gentle plant hath blown, they go  
Deep-written all their days with care—  
To rear the children, to make fast  
Their hold, to win them wealth ; and then  
Much darkness, if the seed at last  
Bear fruit in good or evil men !  
And one thing at the end of all  
Abideth, that which all men dread :  
The wealth is won, the limbs are bred  
To manhood, and the heart withal  
Honest : and, lo, where Fortune smiled,  
Some change, and what hath fallen ? Hark !  
'Tis death slow winging to the dark,  
And in his arms what was thy child.

What therefore doth it bring of gain  
To man, whose cup stood full before,



That God should send this one thing more  
Of hunger and of dread, a door  
Set wide to every wind of pain?

[MEDEA comes out alone from the house.]

MEDEA.

Friends, this long hour I wait on Fortune's eyes,  
And strain my senses in a hot surmise  
What passeth on that hill.—Ha! even now  
There comes . . . 'tis one of Jason's men, I trow.  
His wild-perturb'd breath doth warrant me  
The tidings of some strange calamity.

[Enter MESSENGER.]

MESSENGER.

O dire and ghastly deed! Get thee away,  
Medea! Fly! Nor let behind thee stay  
One chariot's wing, one keel that sweeps the seas. . . .

MEDEA.

And what hath chanced, to cause such flights as these?

MESSENGER.

The maiden princess lieth—and her sire,  
The king—both murdered by thy poison-fire.

MEDEA.

Most happy tidings! Which thy name prefers  
Henceforth among my friends and well-wishers.

## MESSENGER.

What say'st thou? Woman, is thy mind within  
Clear, and not raving? Thou art found in sin  
Most bloody wrought against the king's high head,  
And laughest at the tale, and hast no dread?

## MEDEA.

I have words also that could answer well  
Thy word. But take thine ease, good friend, and tell,  
How died they? Hath it been a very foul  
Death, prithee? That were comfort to my soul.

## MESSENGER.

When thy two children, hand in hand entwined,  
Came with their father, and passed on to find  
The new-made bridal rooms, Oh, we were glad,  
We thralls, who ever loved thee well, and had  
Grief in thy grief. And straight there passed a word  
From ear to ear, that thou and thy false lord  
Had poured peace offering upon wrath foregone.  
A right glad welcome gave we them, and one  
Kissed the small hand, and one the shining hair:  
Myself, for very joy, I followed where  
The women's rooms are. There our mistress . . . she  
Whom now we name so . . . thinking not to see  
Thy little pair, with glad and eager brow  
Sate waiting Jason. Then she saw, and slow  
Shrouded her eyes, and backward turned again,  
Sick that thy children should come near her. Then

Thy husband quick went forward, to entreat  
The young maid's fitful wrath. "Thou wilt not  
meet

Love's coming with unkindness? Nay, refrain  
Thy suddenness, and turn thy face again,  
Holding as friends all that to me are dear,  
Thine husband. And accept these robes they bear  
As gifts : and beg thy father to unmake  
His doom of exile on them—for my sake."

When once she saw the raiment, she could still  
Her joy no more, but gave him all his will.  
And almost ere the father and the two  
Children were gone from out the room, she drew  
The flowerèd garments forth, and sate her down  
To her arraying : bound the golden crown  
Through her long curls, and in a mirror fair  
Arranged their separate clusters, smiling there  
At the dead self that faced her. Then aside  
She pushed her seat, and paced those chambers  
wide

Alone, her white foot poising delicately—  
So passing joyful in those gifts was she !—  
And many a time would pause, straight-limbed, and  
wheel

Her head to watch the long fold to her heel  
Sweeping. And then came something strange. Her  
cheek

Seemed pale, and back with crooked steps and  
weak

Groping of arms she walked, and scarcely found  
Her old seat, that she fell not to the ground.

Among the handmaids was a woman old  
And grey, who deemed, I think, that Pan had hold

Upon her, or some spirit, and raised a keen  
Awakening shout ; till through her lips was seen  
A white foam crawling, and her eyeballs back  
Twisted, and all her face dead pale for lack  
Of life : and while that old dame called, the cry  
Turned strangely to its opposite, to die  
Sobbing. Oh, swiftly then one woman flew  
To seek her father's rooms, one for the new  
Bridegroom, to tell the tale. And all the place  
Was loud with hurrying feet.

So long a space

As a swift walker on a measured way  
Would pace a furlong's course in, there she lay  
Speechless, with veiled lids. Then wide her eyes  
She oped, and wildly, as she strove to rise,  
Shrieked : for two diverse waves upon her rolled  
Of stabbing death. The carcanet of gold  
That gripped her brow was molten in a dire  
And wondrous river of devouring fire.  
And those fine robes, the gift thy children gave—  
God's mercy !—everywhere did lap and lave  
The delicate flesh ; till up she sprang, and fled,  
A fiery pillar, shaking locks and head  
This way and that, seeking to cast the crown  
Somewhere away. But like a thing nailed down  
The burning gold held fast the anadem,  
And through her locks, the more she scattered  
them,  
Came fire the fiercer, till to earth she fell  
A thing—save to her sire—scarce nameable,  
And strove no more. That cheek of royal mien,  
Where was it—or the place where eyes had  
been ?

Only from crown and temples came faint blood  
Shot through with fire. The very flesh, it stood  
Out from the bones, as from a wounded pine  
The gum starts, where those gnawing poisons fine  
Bit in the dark—a ghastly sight ! And touch  
The dead we durst not. We had seen too much.

But that poor father, knowing not, had sped,  
Swift to his daughter's room, and there the dead  
Lay at his feet. He knelt, and groaning low,  
Folded her in his arms, and kissed her : “ Oh,  
Unhappy child, what thing unnatural hath  
So hideously undone thee ? Or what wrath  
Of gods, to make this old grey sepulchre  
Childless of thee ? Would God but lay me there  
To die with thee, my daughter ! ” So he cried.  
But after, when he stayed from tears, and tried  
To uplift his old bent frame, lo, in the folds  
Of those fine robes it held, as ivy holds  
Strangling among young laurel boughs. Oh, then  
A ghastly struggle came ! Again, again,  
Up on his knee he writhed ; but that dead breast  
Clung still to his : till, wild, like one possessed,  
He dragged himself half free ; and, lo, the live  
Flesh parted ; and he laid him down to strive  
No more with death, but perish ; for the deep  
Had risen above his soul. And there they sleep,  
At last, the old proud father and the bride,  
Even as his tears had craved it, side by side.

For thee—Oh, no word more ! Thyself will  
know

How best to baffle vengeance. . . . Long ago  
I looked upon man's days, and found a grey  
Shadow. And this thing more I surely say,

That those of all men who are counted wise,  
Strong wits, devisers of great policies,  
Do pay the bitterest toll. Since life began,  
Hath there in God's eye stood one happy man?  
Fair days roll on, and bear more gifts or less  
Of fortune, but to no man happiness.

[*Exit* MESSENGER.]

CHORUS.

*Some Women.*

Wrath upon wrath, meseems, this day shall fall  
From God on Jason! He hath earned it all.

*Other Women.*

O miserable maiden, all my heart  
Is torn for thee, so sudden to depart  
From thy king's chambers and the light above  
To darkness, all for sake of Jason's love!

MEDEA.

Women, my mind is clear. I go to slay  
My children with all speed, and then, away  
From hence; not wait yet longer till they stand  
Beneath another and an angrier hand  
To die. Yea, howsoe'er I shield them, die  
They must. And, seeing that they must, 'tis I  
Shall slay them, I their mother, touched of none  
Beside. Oh, up, and get thine armour on,

My heart ! Why longer tarry we to win  
Our crown of dire inevitable sin ?  
Take up thy sword, O poor right hand of mine,  
Thy sword : then onward to the thin-drawn line  
Where life turns agony. Let there be naught  
Of softness now : and keep thee from that thought,  
'Born of thy flesh,' 'thine own belovèd.' Now,  
For one brief day, forget thy children : thou  
Shalt weep hereafter. Though thou slay them, yet  
Sweet were they. . . . I am sore unfortunate.  
*[She goes into the house.]*

## CHORUS.

*Some Women.*

O Earth, our mother ; and thou  
All-seër, arrowy crown  
Of Sunlight, manward now  
Look down, Oh, look down !  
Look upon one accurst,  
Ere yet in blood she twine  
Red hands—blood that is thine !  
O Sun, save her first !  
She is thy daughter still,  
Of thine own golden line ;  
Save her ! Or shall man spill  
The life divine ?

Give peace, O Fire that diest not ! Send thy spell  
To stay her yet, to lift her afar, afar—  
A torture-changèd spirit, a voice of Hell  
Wrought of old wrongs and war !

*Others.*

Alas for the mother's pain  
 Wasted ! Alas the dear  
 Life that was born in vain !  
 Woman, what mak'st thou here,  
 Thou from beyond the Gate  
 Where dim Symplêgades  
 Clash in the dark blue seas,  
 The shores where death doth wait ?  
 Why hast thou taken on thee,  
 To make us desolate,  
 This anger of misery  
 And guilt of hate ?

For fierce are the smittings back of blood once shed  
 Where love hath been : God's wrath upon them  
 that kill,  
 And an anguished earth, and the wonder of the dead  
 Haunting as music still. . . .

*[A cry is heard within.]*

*A Woman.*

Hark ! Did ye hear ? Heard ye the children's cry ?

*Another.*

O miserable woman ! O abhorred !

*A Child within.*

What shall I do ? What is it ? Keep me fast  
 From mother !

*The Other Child.*

I know nothing. Brother ! Oh,  
 I think she means to kill us.



*A Woman.*

Let me go !

I will—Help ! Help !—and save them at the last.

*A Child.*

Yes, in God's name ! Help quickly ere we die !

*The Other Child.*

She has almost caught me now. She has a sword.

[*Many of the Women are now beating at the barred door to get in. Others are standing apart.*]

*Women at the door.*

Thou stone, thou thing of iron ! Wilt verily  
Spill with thine hand that life, the vintage stored  
Of thine own agony ?

*The Other Women*

A Mother slew her babes in days of yore,  
One, only one, from dawn to eventide,  
Ino, god-maddened, whom the Queen of Heaven  
Set frenzied, flying to the dark : and she  
Cast her for sorrow to the wide salt sea,  
Forth from those rooms of murder unforgiven,  
Wild-footed from a white crag of the shore,  
And clasping still her children twain, she died.

O Love of Woman, charged with sorrow sore,  
What hast thou wrought upon us ? What beside  
Resteth to tremble for ?

[*Enter hurriedly JASON and Attendants.*]

JASON.

Ye women by this doorway clustering  
Speak, is the doer of the ghastly thing  
Yet here, or fled? What hopeth she of flight?  
Shall the deep yawn to shield her? Shall the height  
Send wings, and hide her in the vaulted sky  
To work red murder on her lords, and fly  
Unrecompensed? But let her go! My care  
Is but to save my children, not for her.  
Let them she wronged requite her as they may.  
I care not. 'Tis my sons I must some way  
Save, ere the kinsmen of the dead can win  
From them the payment of their mother's sin.

LEADER.

Unhappy man, indeed thou knowest not  
What dark place thou art come to! Else, God  
wot,  
Jason, no word like these could fall from thee.

JASON.

What is it?—Ha! The woman would kill me?

LEADER.

Thy sons are dead, slain by their mother's hand.

JASON.

How? Not the children. . . . I scarce under-  
stand. . . .  
O God, thou hast broken me!

LEADER.

Think of those twain  
As things once fair, that ne'er shall bloom again.

JASON.

Where did she murder them? In that old room?

LEADER.

Open, and thou shalt see thy children's doom.

JASON.

Ho, thralls! Unloose me yonder bars! Make more  
Of speed! Wrench out the jointing of the door.  
And show my two-edged curse, the children dead,  
The woman. . . . Oh, this sword upon her  
head. . . .

*[While the Attendants are still battering at  
the door MEDEA appears on the roof,  
standing on a chariot of winged Dragons,  
in which are the children's bodies.]*

MEDEA.

What make ye at my gates? Why batter ye  
With brazen bars, seeking the dead and me  
Who slew them? Peace! . . . And thou, if aught  
of mine  
Thou needest, speak, though never touch of thine

Shall scathe me more. Out of his firmament  
 My fathers' father, the high Sun, hath sent  
 This, that shall save me from mine enemies' rage.

JASON.

Thou living hate ! Thou wife in every age  
 Abhorred, blood-red mother, who didst kill  
 My sons, and make me as the dead : and still  
 Canst take the sunshine to thine eyes, and smell  
 The green earth, reeking from thy deed of hell ;  
 I curse thee ! Now, Oh, now mine eyes can see,  
 That then were blinded, when from savagery  
 Of eastern chambers, from a cruel land,  
 To Greece and home I gathered in mine hand  
 Thee, thou incarnate curse : one that betrayed  
 Her home, her father, her . . . Oh, God hath  
 laid

Thy sins on me !—I knew, I knew, there lay  
 A brother murdered on thy hearth that day  
 When thy first footstep fell on Argo's hull. . .  
 Argo, my own, my swift and beautiful !

That was her first beginning. Then a wife  
 I made her in my house. She bore to life  
 Children : and now for love, for chambering  
 And men's arms, she hath murdered them ! A  
 thing

Not one of all the maids of Greece, not one,  
 Had dreamed of ; whom I spurned, and for mine  
 own

Chose thee, a bride of hate to me and death,  
 Tigress, not woman, beast of wilder breath

Than Skylla shrieking o'er the Tuscan sea.  
Enough ! No scorn of mine can reach to thee,  
Such iron is o'er thine eyes. Out from my road,  
Thou crime-begetter, blind with children's blood !  
And let me weep alone the bitter tide  
That sweepeth Jason's days, no gentle bride  
To speak with more, no child to look upon  
Whom once I reared . . . all, all for ever gone !

## MEDEA.

An easy answer had I to this swell  
Of speech, but Zeus our father knoweth well,  
All I for thee have wrought, and thou for me.  
So let it rest. This thing was not to be,  
That thou shouldst live a merry life, my bed  
Forgotten and my heart uncomforted,  
Thou nor thy princess: nor the king that planned  
Thy marriage drive Medea from his land,  
And suffer not. Call me what thing thou please,  
Tigress or Skylla from the Tuscan seas :  
My claws have gripped thine heart, and all things  
shine.

## JASON.

Thou too hast grief. Thy pain is fierce as mine.

## MEDEA.

I love the pain, so thou shalt laugh no more.

## JASON.

Oh, what a womb of sin my children bore !

MEDEA.

Sons, did ye perish for your father's shame ?

JASON.

How ? It was not my hand that murdered them.

MEDEA.

'Twas thy false wooings, 'twas thy trampling pride.

JASON.

Thou hast said it ! For thy lust of love they died.

MEDEA.

And love to women a slight thing should be ?

JASON.

To women pure !—All thy vile life to thee !

MEDEA.

Think of thy torment. They are dead, they are dead !

JASON.

No : quick, great God ; quick curses round thy head !

MEDEA.

The Gods know who began this work of woe.

JASON.

Thy heart and all its loathliness they know.

MEDEA.

Loathe on. . . . But, Oh, thy voice. It hurts me  
sore.

JASON.

Aye, and thine me. Wouldst hear me then no more?

MEDEA.

How? Show me but the way. 'Tis this I crave.

JASON.

Give me the dead to weep, and make their grave.

MEDEA.

Never! Myself will lay them in a still  
Green sepulchre, where Hera by the Hill  
Hath precinct holy, that no angry men  
May break their graves and cast them forth again  
To evil. So I lay on all this shore  
Of Corinth a high feast for evermore  
And rite, to purge them yearly of the stain  
Of this poor blood. And I, to Pallas' plain  
I go, to dwell beside Pandion's son,  
Aegeus.—For thee, behold, death draweth on,  
Evil and lonely, like thine heart: the hands  
Of thine old Argo, rotting where she stands,

Shall smite thine head in twain, and bitter be  
To the last end thy memories of me.

*[She rises on the chariot and is slowly borne away.]*

JASON.

May They that hear the weeping child  
Blast thee, and They that walk in blood !

MEDEA.

Thy broken vows, thy friends beguiled  
Have shut for thee the ears of God.

JASON.

Go, thou art wet with children's tears !

MEDEA.

Go thou, and lay thy bride to sleep.

JASON.

Childless, I go, to weep and weep.

MEDEA.

Not yet ! Age cometh and long years.

JASON.

My sons, mine own !

MEDEA.

Not thine, but mine . . .

JASON.

. . . Who slew them !

MEDEA.

Yes : to torture thee.

JASON.

Once let me kiss their lips, once twine  
Mine arms and touch. . . . Ah, woe is me !



MEDEA.

Wouldst love them and entreat? But now  
They were as nothing.

JASON.

At the last,  
O God, to touch that tender brow!

MEDEA.

Thy words upon the wind are cast.

JASON.

Thou, Zeus, wilt hear me. All is said  
For naught. I am but spurned away  
And trampled by this tigress, red  
With children's blood. Yet, come what may,  
So far as thou hast granted, yea,  
So far as yet my strength may stand,  
I weep upon these dead, and say  
Their last farewell, and raise my hand

To all the daemons of the air  
In witness of these things; how she  
Who slew them, will not suffer me  
To gather up my babes, nor bear  
To earth their bodies; whom, O stone  
Of women, would I ne'er had known  
Nor gotten, to be slain by thee!  
*[He casts himself upon the earth.]*

## CHORUS.

Great treasure halls hath Zeus in heaven,  
From whence to man strange dooms be given,  
    Past hope or fear.  
And the end men looked for cometh not,  
And a path is there where no man thought :  
    So hath it fallen here.

## NOTES TO MEDEA

P. 3, l. 2, To Colchis through the blue Symplêgades.]—The Symplêgades ("Clashing") or Kuaneai ("Dark blue") were two rocks in the sea which used to clash together and crush anything that was between them. They stood above the north end of the Bosphorus and formed the Gate (l. 1264, p. 70) to the Axeinos Pontos, or "Stranger-less Sea," where all Greeks were murdered. At the farthest eastern end of that sea was the land of Colchis.

P. 3, l. 3, Pêlion.]—The great mountain in Thessaly. Iôlcos, a little kingdom between Pêlion and the sea, ruled originally by Aeson, Jason's father, then by the usurping Pëlias.

P. 3, l. 9, Daughters of Pëlias.]—See Introduction, p. vii.

P. 4, l. 18, Wed.]—Medea was not legally married to Jason, and could not be, though in common parlance he is sometimes called her husband. Inter-marriage between the subjects of two separate states was not possible in antiquity without a special treaty. And naturally there was no such treaty with Colchis.

This is, I think, the view of the play, and corresponds to the normal Athenian conceptions of society. In the original legend it is likely enough that Medea belongs to "matriarchal" times before the institution of marriage.

P. 4, l. 18, Head of Corinth.]—A peculiar word

(*αἰσυμνᾶν*) afterwards used to translate the Roman *dictator*. Creon is, however, apparently descended from the ancient king Sisyphus.

P. 4, l. 40, She hath a blade made keen, &c.]—These lines (40, 41) are repeated in a different context later on, p. 23, ll. 379, 380. The sword which to the Nurse suggested suicide was really meant for murder. There is a similar and equally dramatic repetition of the lines about the crown and wreath (786, 949, pp. 46, 54), and of those about the various characters popularly attributed to Medea (ll. 304, 808, pp. 18, 46).

P. 5, l. 48, ATTENDANT.]—Greek *Paidagōgos*, or “pedagogue”; a confidential servant who escorted the boys to and from school, and in similar ways looked after them. Notice the rather light and cynical character of this man, compared with the tenderness of the Nurse.

P. 5, l. 57, To this still earth and sky.]—Not a mere stage explanation. It was the ancient practice, if you had bad dreams or terrors of the night, to “show” them to the Sun in the morning, that he might clear them away.

P. 8, l. 111, Have I not suffered? ]—Medea is apparently answering some would-be comforter. Cf. p. 4. (“If friends will speak,” &c.)

P. 9, l. 131, CHORUS.]—As Dr. Verrall has remarked, the presence of the Chorus is in this play unusually awkward from the dramatic point of view. Medea’s plot demands most absolute secrecy; and it is incredible that fifteen Corinthian women, simply because they were women, should allow a half-mad foreigner to murder several people, including their own Corinthian king and princess—who was a

woman also—rather than reveal her plot. We must remember in palliation (1) that these women belong to the faction in Corinth which was friendly to Medea and hostile to Creon; (2) that the appeal to them as women had more force in antiquity than it would now, and the princess had really turned traitor to her sex. (See note on this subject at the end of the present writer's translation of the *Electra*.) (3) The non-interference of the Chorus seems monstrous: yet in ancient times, when law was weak and punishment was chiefly the concern of the injured persons, and of no one else, the reluctance of bystanders to interfere was much greater than it is now in an ordered society. Some oriental countries, and perhaps even California or Texas, could afford us some startling instances of impassiveness among bystanders.

P. 12, l. 167, Oh, wild words!]  
—The Nurse breaks in, hoping to drown her mistress's dangerous self-betrayal. Medea's murder of her brother (see Introduction, p. vi) was by ordinary standards her worst act, and seems not to have been known in Corinth. It forms the climax of Jason's denunciation, l. 1334, p. 74.

P. 13, l. 190, Alas, the brave blithe bards, &c.]  
—Who is the speaker? According to the MSS. the Nurse, and there is some difficulty in taking the lines from her. Yet (1) she has no reason to sing a song outside after saying that she is going in; and (2) it is quite necessary that she should take a little time indoors persuading Medea to come out. The words seem to suit the lips of an impersonal Chorus.

The general sense of the poem is interesting. It is

an apology for tragedy. It gives the tragic poet's conception of the place of his art in the service of humanity, as against the usual feeling of the public, whose serious work is devoted to something else, and who "go to a play to be amused."

P. 14, l. 214, Women of Corinth, I am come, &c.]—These opening lines are a well-known *crux interpretum*. It is interesting to note, (1) that the Roman poet Ennius (ca. 200 B.C.) who translated the *Medea*, did not understand them in the least; while, on the other hand, the earliest Greek commentators seem not to have noticed that there was any difficulty in them worth commenting upon. That implies that while the acting tradition was alive and unbroken, the lines were easily understood; but when once the tradition failed, the meaning was lost. (The first commentator who deals with the passage is Irenaeus, a scholar of the Augustan time.)

P. 15, l. 231, A herb most bruised is woman.]—This fine statement of the wrongs of women in Athens doubtless contains a great deal of the poet's own mind; but from the dramatic point of view it is justified in several ways. (1) Medea is seeking for a common ground on which to appeal to the Corinthian women. (2) She herself is now in the position of all others in which a woman is most hardly treated as compared with a man. (3) Besides this, one can see that, being a person of great powers and vehement will, she feels keenly her lack of outlet. If she had men's work to do, she could be a hero: debarred from proper action (from τὸ πράσσειν, *Hip.* 1019) she is bound to make mischief. Cf. p. 24, ll. 408, 409. "Things most vain, &c."

There is a slight anachronism in applying the Attic system of doweries to primitive times. Medea's contemporaries either lived in a "matriarchal" system without any marriage, or else were bought by their husbands for so many cows.

P. 17, l. 271, CREON.]—Observe the somewhat archaic abruptness of this scene, a sign of the early date of the play.

P. 18, l. 295, Wise beyond men's wont.]—Medea was a "wise woman," which in her time meant much the same as a witch or enchantress. She did really know more than other women; but most of this extra knowledge consisted—or was supposed to consist—either in lore of poisons and charms, or in useless learning and speculation.

P. 18, l. 304, A seed of strife, an Eastern dreamer, &c.]—The meaning of these various "ill names" is not certain. Cf. l. 808, p. 46. Most scholars take *θατέρου τρόπου* ("of the other sort") to mean "the opposite of a dreamer."

P. 20, ll. 333-4, What would I with thy pains? ]—A conceit almost in the Elizabethan style, as if by taking "pains" away from Creon, she would have them herself.

P. 20, l. 335, Not that! Not that! ]—Observe what a dislike Medea has of being touched: cf. l. 370 ("my flesh been never stained," &c.) and l. 496 ("poor, poor right hand of mine!"), pp. 22, and 28.

P. 22, l. 364, Defeat on every side.]—Observe (1) that in this speech Medea's vengeance is to take the form of a clear fight to the death against the three guilty persons. It is both courageous and,

judged by the appropriate standard, just. (2) She wants to save her own life, not from cowardice, but simply to make her revenge more complete. To kill her enemies and escape is victory. To kill them and die with them is only a drawn battle. Other enemies will live and "laugh." (3) Already in this first soliloquy there is a suggestion of that strain of madness which becomes unmistakable later on in the play. ("Oh, I have tried so many thoughts of murder," &c., and especially the lashing of her own fury, "Awake thee now, Medea.")

P. 24, l. 405, Thief's daughter: lit. "a child of Sisyphus."—Sisyphus, an ancient king of Corinth, was one of the well-known sinners punished in Tartarus. Medea's father, Aiêtês, was a brother of Circe, and born of the Sun.

P. 24, l. 409, Things most vain for help.]—See on ll. 230 ff.

P. 24, ll. 410-430, CHORUS.]—The song celebrates the coming triumph of Woman in her rebellion against Man; not by any means Woman as typifying the domestic virtues, but rather as the downtrodden, uncivilised, unreasoning, and fiercely emotional half of humanity. A woman who in defence of her honour and her rights will die sword in hand, slaying the man who wronged her, seems to the Chorus like a deliverer of the whole sex.

P. 24, l. 421, Old bards.]—Early literature in most countries contains a good deal of heavy satire on women: *e.g.* Hesiod's "Who trusts a woman trusts a thief;" or Phocylides' "Two days of a woman are very sweet: when you marry her and when you carry her to her grave."



It is curious how the four main Choruses of the *Medea* are divided each into two parts, distinct in subject and in metre.

P. 25, l. 439, Faith is no more sweet.]—Copied from a beautiful passage in Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 198 ff.: "There shall be no more sweetness found in the faithful man nor the righteous. . . . And at last up to Olympus from the wide-wayed earth, shrouding with white raiment their beautiful faces, go Ruth and Rebuking." (Aidos and Nemesis: *i.e.* the Ruth or Shame that you feel with reference to your own actions, and the Indignation or Disapproval that others feel.)

P. 27, ll. 478 ff., Bulls of fiery breath.]—Among the tasks set him by Aiêtês, Jason had to yoke two fire-breathing bulls, and plough with them a certain Field of Ares, sow the field with dragon's teeth, and reap a harvest of earth-born or giant warriors which sprang from the seed. When all this was done, there remained the ancient serpent coiled round the tree where the Golden Fleece was hanging.

P. 29, l. 507, The first friends who sheltered me.]—*i.e.* the kindred of Pelias.

P. 29, l. 509, Blest of many a maid in Hellas.]—Jason was, of course, the great romantic hero of his time. Cf. his own words, l. 1340, p. 74.

Pp. 29 ff., ll. 523–575.—Jason's defence is made the weaker by his reluctance to be definitely insulting to Medea. He dares not say: "You think that, because you conceived a violent passion for me,—to which, I admit, I partly responded—I must live with you always; but the truth is, you are a savage with whom a civilised man cannot go on living." This

point comes out unveiled in his later speech, l. 1329 ff., p. 74.

P. 30, ll. 536 ff., Our ordered life and justice.]—Jason has brought the benefits of civilisation to Medea! He is doubtless sincere, but the peculiar ironic cruelty of the plea is obvious.

P. 30, ll. 541 ff., The story of Great Medea, &c. . . . Unless our deeds have glory.]—This, I think, is absolutely sincere. To Jason ambition is everything. And, as Medea has largely shared his great deeds with him, he thinks that she cannot but feel the same. It seems to him contemptible that her mere craving for personal love should outweigh all the possible glories of life.

P. 31, l. 565, What more need hast thou of children?}]—He only means, “of more children than you now have.” But the words suggest to Medea a different meaning, and sow in her mind the first seed of the child-murder. See on the *Aegeus* scene below.

P. 34, l. 608, A living curse.]—Though she spoke no word, the existence of a being so deeply wronged would be a curse on her oppressors. So a murdered man's blood, or an involuntary cry of pain (*Aesch. Ag.* 237) on the part of an injured person is in itself fraught with a curse.

P. 35, ll. 627–641, CHORUS. Alas, the Love, &c.]—A highly characteristic Euripidean poem, keenly observant of fact, yet with a lyrical note penetrating all its realism. A love which really produces “good to man and glory,” is treated in the next chorus, l. 844 ff., p. 49.

Pp. 37 ff., ll. 663–759, *AEGEUS*.]—This scene is generally considered to be a mere blot on the play,

not, I think, justly. It is argued that the obvious purpose which the scene serves, the provision of an asylum for Medea, has no keen dramatic interest. The spectator would just as soon, or sooner, have her die. And, besides, her actual mode of escape is largely independent of Aegeus. Further, the arrival of Aegeus at this moment seems to be a mere coincidence (*Ar. Poetics*, 61 b, 23), and one cannot help suspecting that the Athenian poet was influenced by mere local interests in dragging in the Athenian king and the praises of Athens where they were not specially appropriate.

To these criticisms one may make some answer. (1) As to the coincidence, it is important to remember always that Greek tragedies are primarily historical plays, not works of fiction. They are based on definite *Logoi* or traditions (*Frogs*, l. 1052, p. 254) and therefore can, and should, represent accidental coincidences when it was a datum of the tradition that these coincidences actually happened. By Aristotle's time the practice had changed. The tragedies of his age were essentially fiction; and he tends to criticise the ancient tragedies by fictional standards.

Now it was certainly a datum in the Medea legend that she took refuge with Aegeus, King of Athens, and was afterwards an enemy to his son Theseus; but I think we may go further. This play pretty certainly has for its foundation the rites performed by the Corinthians at the Grave of the Children of Medea in the precinct of Hera Acraia near Corinth. See on l. 1379, p. 77. The legend in such cases is usually invented to explain the ritual; and I suspect that in the ritual, and,

consequently, in the legend, there were two other data : first, a pursuit of Medea and her flight on a dragon-chariot, and, secondly, a meeting between Medea and Aegeus. (Both subjects are frequent on vase paintings, and may well be derived from historical pictures in some temple at Corinth.)

Thus, the meeting with Aegeus is probably not the free invention of Euripides, but one of the data supplied to him by his subject. But he has made it serve, as von Arnim was the first to perceive, a remarkable dramatic purpose. Aegeus was under a curse of childlessness, and his desolate condition suggests to Medea the ultimate form of her vengeance. She will make Jason childless. Cf. l. 670, "Children! Ah God, art childless?" (A childless king in antiquity was a miserable object : likely to be deposed and dishonoured, and to miss his due worship after death. See the fragments of Euripides' *Oineus*.)

There is also a further purpose in the scene, of a curious and characteristic kind. In several plays of Euripides, when a heroine hesitates on the verge of a crime, the thing that drives her over the brink is some sudden and violent lowering of her self-respect. Thus Phædra writes her false letter immediately after her public shame. Creûsa in the *Ion* turns murderous only after crying in the god's ears the story of her seduction. Medea, a princess and, as we have seen, a woman of rather proud chastity, feels, after the offer which she makes to Aegeus in this scene (l. 716 ff., p. 42), that she need shrink from nothing.

P. 38, l. 681, [The hearth-stone of my sires of yore.] —This sounds as if it meant Aegeus' own house : in reality, by an oracular riddle, it meant the house of

Pittheus, by whose daughter, Aethra, Aegeus became the father of Theseus.

P. 43, l. 731, An oath wherein to trust.]—Observe that Medea is deceiving Aegeus. She intends to commit a murder before going to him, and therefore wishes to bind him down so firmly that, however much he wish to repudiate her, he shall be unable. Hence this insistence on the oath and the exact form of the oath. (At this time, apparently, she scarcely thinks of the children, only of her revenge.)

P. 46, l. 808, No eastern dreamer, &c.]—See on l. 304.

P. 47, l. 820, *The NURSE comes out.*]—There is no indication in the original to show who comes out. But it is certainly a woman; as certainly it is not one of the Chorus; and Medea's words suit the Nurse well. It is an almost devilish act to send the Nurse, who would have died rather than take such a message had she understood it.

P. 48, ll. 824–846, The sons of Erechtheus, &c.]—This poem is interesting as showing the ideal conception of Athens entertained by a fifth-century Athenian. One might compare with it Pericles' famous speech in Thucydides, ii., where the emphasis is laid on Athenian "plain living and high thinking" and the freedom of daily life. Or, again, the speeches of Aethra in Euripides' *Suppliant Women*, where more stress is laid on mercy and championship of the oppressed.

The allegory of "Harmony," as a sort of Korê, or Earth-maiden, planted by all the Muses in the soil of Attica, seems to be an invention of the poet. Not any given Art or Muse, but a spirit which unites and

harmonises all, is the special spirit of Athens. The Attic connection with Erôs, on the other hand, is old and traditional. But Euripides has transformed the primitive nature-god into a mystic and passionate longing for "all manner of high deed," a Love which, different from that described in the preceding chorus, really ennobles human life.

This first part of the Chorus is, of course, suggested by Aegeus; the second is more closely connected with the action of the play. "How can Medea dream of asking that stainless land to shelter her crimes? But the whole plan of her revenge is not only wicked but impossible. She simply could not do such a thing, if she tried."

Pp. 50 ff., l. 869, The second scene with Jason.]—Dicæarchus, and perhaps his master Aristotle also, seems to have complained of Medea's bursting into tears in this scene, instead of acting her part consistently—a very prejudiced criticism. What strikes one about Medea's assumed rôle is that in it she remains so like herself and so unlike another woman. Had she really determined to yield to Jason, she would have done so in just this way, keen-sighted and yet passionate. One is reminded of the deceits of half-insane persons, which are due not so much to conscious art as to the emergence of another side of the personality.

P. 54, l. 949, Fine robings, &c.]—Repeated from l. 786, p. 46, where it came full in the midst of Medea's avowal of her murderous purpose. It startles one here, almost as though she had spoken out the word "murder" in some way which Jason could not understand.

P. 56, l. 976, CHORUS.]—The inaction of the Chorus women during the last scene will not bear thinking about, if we regard them as real human beings, like, for instance, the Bacchæ and the Trojan Women in the plays that bear their name. Still there is not only beauty, but, I think, great dramatic value in the conventional and almost mystical quality of this Chorus, and also in the low and quiet tone of that which follows, l. 1081 ff.

P. 59, ll. 1021 ff., Why does Medea kill her children?—She acts not for one clearly stated reason, like a heroine in Sardou, but for many reasons, both conscious and subconscious, as people do in real life. Any analysis professing to be exact would be misleading, but one may note some elements in her feeling: (1) She had played dangerously long with the notion of making Jason childless. (2) When she repented of this (l. 1046, p. 60) the children had already been made the unconscious murderers of the princess. They were certain to be slain, perhaps with tortures, by the royal kindred. (3) Medea might take them with her to Athens and trust to the hope of Aegeus' being able and willing to protect them. But it was a doubtful chance, and she would certainly be in a position of weakness and inferiority if she had the children to protect. (4) In the midst of her passionate half-animal love for the children, there was also an element of hatred, because they were Jason's: cf. l. 112, p. 8. (5) She also seems to feel, in a sort of wild-beast way, that by killing them she makes them more her own: cf. l. 793, p. 46, "Mine, whom no hand shall steal from me away;" l. 1241, p. 68, "touched of none beside." (6)

Euripides had apparently observed how common it is, when a woman's mind is deranged by suffering, that her madness takes the form of child-murder. The terrible lines in which Medea speaks to the "Wrath" within her, as if it were a separate being (l. 1056, p. 60), seem to bear out this view.

P. 59, l. 1038, Other shapes of life.]—A mystical conception of death. Cf. *Ion*, 1067, where almost exactly the same phrase is used.

P. 61, l. 1078, I know to what bad deeds, &c.]—This expression of double consciousness was immensely famous in antiquity. It is quoted by Lucian, Plutarch, Clement, Galen, Synesius, Hierocles, Arrian, Simplicius, besides being imitated, e.g. by Ovid: "video meliora proboque, Deteriora sequor."

P. 63, l. 1123 ff., MESSENGER.]—A pendant to the Attendant's entrance above, l. 1002. The Attendant, bringing apparently good news, is received with a moan of despair, the Messenger of calamity with serene satisfaction. Cf. the Messenger who announces the death of Pentheus in the *Bacchæ*.

P. 65, l. 1162, Dead self.]—The reflection in the glass, often regarded as ominous or uncanny in some way.

P. 66, l. 1176, The cry turned strangely to its opposite.]—The notion was that an evil spirit could be scared away by loud cheerful shouts—*ololugæ*. But while this old woman is making an *ololugê*, she sees that the trouble is graver than she thought, and the cheerful cry turns into a wail.

P. 68, l. 1236, Women, my mind is clear.]—With the silence in which Medea passes over the success of her vengeance compare Theseus' words, *Hip.*,



l. 1260, "I laugh not, neither weep, at this fell doom."

P. 69, l. 1249, Thou shalt weep hereafter.]—Cf. *Othello*, v. ii., "Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kiss thee, And love thee after."

P. 69, ll. 1251 ff.—This curious prayer to the Sun to "save" Medea—both from the crime of killing her children and the misfortune of being caught by her enemies—is apparently meant to prepare us for the scene of the Dragon Chariot. Notice the emphasis laid on the divine origin of Medea's race and her transformation to "a voice of Hell."

P. 71, ll. 1278 ff., Death of the children.]—The door is evidently barred, since Jason has to use crow-bars to open it in l. 1317. Cf. the end of Maeterlinck's *Mort de Tintagiles*.

P. 71, l. 1281, A mother slew her babes in days of yore, &c.]—Ino, wife of Athamas, King of Thebes, nursed the infant Dionysus. For this Hera punished her with madness. She killed her two children, Learchus and Melicertes, and leaped into the sea. (There are various versions of the story.)—Observe the technique: just as the strain is becoming intolerable, we are turned away from tragedy to pure poetry. See on *Hip.* 731.

P. 74, l. 1320, This, that shall save me from mine enemies' rage.]—There is nothing in the words of the play to show what "this" is, but the Scholiast explains it as a chariot drawn by winged serpents, and the stage tradition seems to be clear on the subject. See note to the Aegeus scene (p. 88).

This first appearance of Medea "above, on the

tower" (Scholiast) seems to me highly effective. The result is to make Medea into something like a *dea ex machinâ*, who prophesies and pronounces judgment. See Introduction.

P. 76, l. 1370, They are dead, they are dead !]—This wrangle, though rather like some scenes in Norse sagas, is strangely discordant for a Greek play. It seems as if Euripides had deliberately departed from his usual soft and reflective style of ending in order to express the peculiar note of discord which is produced by the so-called "satisfaction" of revenge. Medea's curious cry : "Oh, thy voice ! It hurts me sore !" shows that the effect is intentional.

P. 77, l. 1379, A still green sepulchre.]—There was a yearly festival in the precinct of Hera Acaia, near Corinth, celebrating the deaths of Medea's children. This festival, together with its ritual and "sacred legend," evidently forms the germ of the whole tragedy. Cf. the Trozenian rites over the tomb of Hippolytus, *Hip.* 1424 ff.

P. 77, l. 1386, The hands of thine old Argo—Jason, left friendless and avoided by his kind, went back to live with his old ship, now rotting on the shore. While he was sleeping under it, a beam of wood fell upon him and broke his head. It is a most grave mistake to treat the line as spurious.

# THE IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

## CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

IPHIGENÎA, *eldest daughter of Agamemnon, King of Argos ; supposed to have been sacrificed by him to Artemis at Aulis.*

ORESTES, *her brother ; pursued by Furies for killing his mother, Clytemnestra, who had murdered Agamemnon.*

PYLADES, *Prince of Phocis, friend to Orestes.*

THOAS, *King of Tauris, a savage country beyond the Symplégades.*

A HERDSMAN.

A MESSENGER.

CHORUS of Captive Greek Women, handmaids to Iphigenîa.

The Goddess PALLAS ATHENA.

*The play was first performed between the years 414 and 412 B.C.*

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THE *Iphigenia in Tauris* is not in the modern sense a tragedy ; it is a romantic play, beginning in a tragic atmosphere and moving through perils and escapes to a happy end. To the archaeologist the cause of this lies in the ritual on which the play is based. All Greek tragedies that we know have as their nucleus something which the Greeks called an *Aition*—a cause or origin. They all explain some ritual or observance or commemorate some great event. Nearly all, as a matter of fact, have for this *Aition* a Tomb Ritual, as, for instance, the *Hippolytus* has the worship paid by the Trozenian Maidens at that hero's grave. The use of this Tomb Ritual may well explain both the intense shadow of death that normally hangs over the Greek tragedies, and also perhaps the feeling of the Fatality, which is, rightly or wrongly, supposed to be prominent in them. For if you are actually engaged in commemorating your hero's funeral, it follows that all through the story, however bright his prospects may seem, you feel that he is bound to die ; he cannot escape. A good many tragedies, however, are built not on Tomb Rituals but on other sacred *Aitia* : on the foundation of a city, like the *Aetnae*, the ritual of the torch-race, like the *Prometheus* ; on some great legendary succouring of the oppressed, like the

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*Suppliant Women* of Aeschylus and Euripides. And the rite on which the *Iphigenîa* is based is essentially one in which a man is brought to the verge of death but just does not die.

The rite is explained in ll. 1450 ff. of the play. On a certain festival at Halae in Attica a human victim was led to the altar of Artemis Tauropolos, touched on the throat with a sword and then set free: very much what happened to Orestes among the Tauri, and exactly what happened to Iphigenîa at Aulis. Both legends have doubtless grown out of the same ritual.

Like all the great Greek legends, the Iphigenîa myths take many varying forms. They are all of them, in their essence, conjectural restorations, by poets or other 'wise men,' of supposed early history. According to the present play, Agamemnon, when just about to sail with all the powers of Greece against Troy, was bound by weather at Aulis. The medicine-man Calchas explained that Artemis demanded the sacrifice of his daughter, Iphigenîa, who was then at home with her mother, Clytemnestra. Odysseus and Agamemnon sent for the maiden on the pretext that she was to be married to the famous young hero, Achilles; she was brought to Aulis and treacherously slaughtered—or, at least, so people thought.

There is a subject for tragedy there; and it was brilliantly treated in Euripides' *Iphigenîa in Aulis*, which was probably left unfinished at his death. But our play chooses a later moment of the story.

In reality Artemis at the last moment saved Iphigenîa, rapt her away from mortal eyes and set her down in the land of the Tauri to be her priestess. (*In*

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*Tauris* is only the Latin for "among the Tauri".) These Tauri possessed an image of Artemis which had fallen from heaven, and kept up a savage rite of sacrificing to it all strangers who were cast on their shores. Iphigenîa, obedient to her goddess and held by "the spell of the altar," had to consecrate the victims as they went in to be slain. So far only barbarian strangers had come: she waited half in horror, half in a rage of revenge, for the day when she should have to sacrifice a Greek. The first Greek that came was her own brother, Orestes, who had been sent by Apollo to take the image of Artemis and bear it to Attica, where it should no more be stained with human sacrifice.

If we try to turn from these myths to the historical facts that underly them, we may conjecture that there were three goddesses of the common Aegean type, worshipped in different places. At Brauron and elsewhere there was Iphigenîa ('Birth-mighty'); at Halae there was the Tauropolos ('the Bull-rider,' like Europa, who rode on the horned Moon); among the savage and scarcely known Tauri there was some goddess to whom shipwrecked strangers were sacrificed. Lastly there came in the Olympian Artemis. Now all these goddesses (except possibly the Taurian, of whom we know little) were associated with the Moon and with childbirth, and with rites for sacrificing or redeeming the first-born. Naturally enough, therefore, they were all gradually absorbed by the prevailing worship of Artemis. Tauropolos became an epithet of Artemis, Iphigenîa became her priestess and 'Keybearer.' And the word 'Tauropolos,' which had become obscure, was explained as a

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reference to the Tauri. The old rude image of Tauropolos had come from the Tauri, and the strange ritual was descended from their bloody rites. So the Taurian goddess must be Artemis too. The tendency of ancient polytheism, when it met with some alien religion, was not to treat the alien gods as entirely new persons, but assuming the real and obvious existence of their own gods, to inquire by what names and with what ritual the strangers worshipped them.

As usual in Euripides, the central character of this play is a woman, and a woman most unsparingly yet lovingly studied. Iphigenia is no mere 'sympathetic heroine.' She is a worthy member of her great but sinister house; a haggard and exiled woman, eating out her heart in two conflicting emotions: intense longing for home and all that she had loved in childhood, and bitter self-pitying rage against 'her murderers.' The altar of Aulis is constantly in her thoughts. She does not know whether to hate her father, but at least she can with a clear conscience hate all the rest of those implicated, Calchas, Odysseus, Menelaus, and most fiercely, though somewhat unjustly, Helen. All the good women in Euripides go wild at the name of Helen. Iphigenia broods on her wrongs till she can see nothing else; she feels as if she hated all Greeks, and lived only for revenge, for the hope of some day slaughtering Greeks at her altar, as pitilessly as they slaughtered her at Aulis. She knows how horrible this state of mind is, but she is now "turned to stone, and has no pity left in her." Then the Greeks come; and even before she knows who they really are, the hard shell of her bitterness



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slowly yields. Her heart goes out to them ; she draws Orestes against his will into talk ; she insists on pitying him, insists on his pitying her ; and eventually determines, come what may, that she will save at least the one stranger that she has talked with most. Presently comes the discovery who the strangers are ; and she is at once ready to die with them or for them.

As for the scene in which Iphigénia befools Thoas, my moral feelings may be obtuse, but I certainly cannot feel the slightest compunction or shock at the heavy lying. Which of us would not expect at least as much from his own sister, if it lay with her to save him from the altars of Benin or Ashanti ? I suspect that the good people who lament over “the low standard of truthfulness shown by even the most enlightened pagans” have either forgotten the days when they read stories of adventure, or else have not, in reading this scene, realised properly the strain of hairbreadth peril that lies behind the comedy of it. A single slip in Iphigénia’s tissue of desperate improvisations would mean death, and not to herself alone. One feels rather sorry for Thoas, certainly, and he is a very fine fellow in his way ; but a person who insists on slaughtering strangers cannot expect those strangers or their friends to treat him with any approach to candour.

The two young men come nearer to mere ideal *héros de roman* than any other characters in Euripides. They are surpassingly handsome and brave and unselfish and everything that they should be ; and they stand out like heroes against the mob of cowardly

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little Taurians in the Herdsman's speech. Yet they have none of the unreality that is usual in such figures. The shadow of madness and guilt hanging over Orestes makes a difference. At his first entrance, when danger is still far off, he is a mass of broken nerves; he depends absolutely on Pylades. In the later scenes, when they are face to face with death, the underlying strength of the son of the Great King asserts itself and makes one understand why, for all his madness, Orestes is the chief, and Pylades only the devoted follower.

Romantic plays with happy endings are almost of necessity inferior in artistic value to true tragedies. Not, one would hope, simply because they end happily; happiness in itself is certainly not less beautiful than grief; but because a tragedy in its great moments can generally afford to be sincere, while romantic plays live in an atmosphere of ingenuity and make-believe. The *Iphigenia* is not of the same order as *The Trojan Women*. Yet it is a delightful play; subtle, ever-changing, full of movement and poignancy. The recognition scene became to Aristotle a model of what such a scene should be; and the long passage before it, from the entrance of the two princes onward, seems to me one of the most skilful and fascinating in Greek drama.

And after all the adventure of Euripides is not quite like that of the average romantic writer. It is shot through by reflection, by reality and by sadness. There is a shadow that broods over the *Iphigenia*, though it is not the shadow of death. It is exile, homesickness. *Iphigenia*, *Orestes*, the *Women of*

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the Chorus, are all exiles, all away from their heart's home, among savage people and cruel gods. They wait on the shore while the sea-birds take wing for Hellas, out beyond the barrier of the Dark-Blue Rocks and the great stretches of magical and 'unfriended' sea. Nearly all the lyrics are full of sea-light and the clash of waters, and the lyrics are usually the very soul of Euripidean tragedy.

G. M.



# THE IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

*The Scene shows a great and barbaric Temple on a desolate sea-coast. An altar is visible stained with blood. There are spoils of slain men hanging from the roof. IPHIGENIA, in the dress of a Priestess, comes out from the Temple.*

## IPHIGENIA.

Child of the man of torment and of pride  
Tantalid Pelops bore a royal bride  
On flying steeds from Pisa. Thence did spring  
Atreus : from Atreus, linkèd king with king,  
Menelaüs, Agamemnon. His am I  
And Clytemnestra's child : whom cruelly  
At Aulis, where the strait of shifting blue  
Frets with quick winds, for Helen's sake he slew,  
Or thinks to have slain ; such sacrifice he swore  
To Artemis on that deep-bosomed shore.

For there Lord Agamemnon, hot with joy  
To win for Greece the crown of conquered Troy,  
For Menelaüs' sake through all distress  
Pursuing Helen's vanished loveliness,  
Gathered his thousand ships from every coast  
Of Hellas : when there fell on that great host  
Storms and despair of sailing. Then the King  
Sought signs of fire, and Calchas answering

Spake thus : "O Lord of Hellas, from this shore  
No ship of thine may move for evermore,  
Till Artemis receive in gift of blood  
Thy child, Iphigenia. Long hath stood  
Thy vow, to pay to Her that bringeth light  
Whatever birth most fair by day or night  
The year should bring. That year thy queen did  
bear

A child—whom here I name of all most fair.  
See that she die."

So from my mother's side  
By lies Odysseus won me, to be bride  
In Aulis to Achilles. When I came,  
They took me and above the altar flame  
Held, and the sword was swinging to the gash,  
When, lo, out of their vision in a flash  
Artemis rapt me, leaving in my place  
A deer to bleed ; and on through a great space  
Of shining sky upbore and in this town  
Of Tauris the Unfriended set me down ;  
Where o'er a savage people savagely  
King Thoas rules. This is her sanctuary  
And I her priestess. Therefore, by the rite  
Of worship here, wherein she hath delight—  
Though fair in naught but name. . . . But Artemis  
Is near ; I speak no further. Mine it is  
To consecrate and touch the victim's hair ;  
Doings of blood unspoken are the care  
Of others, where her inmost chambers lie.  
Ah me !

But what dark dreams, thou clear and morning sky,  
I have to tell thee, can that bring them ease !  
Meseemed in sleep, far over distant seas,

I lay in Argos, and about me slept  
My maids : and, lo, the level earth was swept  
With quaking like the sea. Out, out I fled,  
And, turning, saw the cornice overhead  
Reel, and the beams and mighty door-trees down  
In blocks of ruin round me overthrown.  
One single oaken pillar, so I dreamed,  
Stood of my father's house ; and hair, meseemed,  
Waved from its head all brown : and suddenly  
A human voice it had, and spoke. And I,  
Fulfilling this mine office, built on blood  
Of unknown men, before that pillar stood,  
And washed him clean for death, mine eyes  
    astream  
With weeping.

    And this way I read my dream.  
Orestes is no more : on him did fall  
My cleansing drops.—The pillar of the hall  
Must be the man first-born ; and they on whom  
My cleansing falls, their way is to the tomb.

Therefore to my dead brother will I pour  
Such sacrifice, I on this bitter shore  
And he beyond great seas, as still I may,  
With all those maids whom Thoas bore away  
In war from Greece and gave me for mine own.  
But wherefore come they not ? I must be gone  
And wait them in the temple, where I dwell.

*[She goes into the Temple.]*

VOICE.

Did some one cross the pathway ? Guard thee  
well.

## ANOTHER VOICE.

I am watching. Every side I turn mine eye.

*Enter ORESTES and PYLADES. Their dress shows they are travellers : ORESTES is shaken and distraught.*

## ORESTES.

How, brother? And is this the sanctuary  
At last, for which we sailed from Argolis?

## PYLADES.

For sure, Orestes. Seest thou not it is?

## ORESTES.

The altar, too, where Hellene blood is shed.

## PYLADES.

How like long hair those blood-stains, tawny red!

## ORESTES.

And spoils of slaughtered men—there by the thatch.

## PYLADES.

Aye, first-fruits of the harvest, when they catch  
Their strangers!—'Tis a place to search with care.  
[*He searches, while ORESTES sits.*]

## ORESTES.

O God, where hast thou brought me? What new  
snare



Is this?—I slew my mother ; I avenged  
 My father at thy bidding ; I have ranged  
 A homeless world, hunted by shapes of pain,  
 And circling trod in mine own steps again.  
 At last I stood once more before thy throne  
 And cried thee question, what thing should be done  
 To end these miseries, wherein I reel  
 Through Hellas, mad, lashed like a burning wheel ;  
 And thou didst bid me seek . . . what land but this  
 Of Tauri, where thy sister Artemis  
 Her altar hath, and seize on that divine  
 Image which fell, men say, into this shrine  
 From heaven. This I must seize by chance or plot  
 Or peril—clearer word was uttered not—  
 And bear to Attic earth. If this be done,  
 I should have peace from all my malison.

Lo, I have done thy will. I have pierced the seas  
 Where no Greek man may live.—Ho, Pylades,  
 Sole sharer of my quest : hast seen it all ?  
 What can we next ? Thou seest this circuit wall  
 Enormous ? Must we climb the public stair,  
 With all men watching ? Shall we seek somewhere  
 Some lock to pick, some secret bolt or bar—  
 Of all which we know nothing ? Where we are,  
 If one man mark us, if they see us prize  
 The gate, or think of entrance anywise,  
 'Tis death.—We still have time to fly for home :  
 Back to the galley quick, ere worse things come !

PYLADES.

To fly we dare not, brother. 'Twere a thing  
 Not of our custom ; and ill work, to bring

God's word to such reviling.—Let us leave  
 The temple now, and gather in some cave  
 Where glooms the cool sea ripple. But not where  
 The ship lies ; men might chance to see her there  
 And tell some chief ; then certain were our doom.  
 But when the fringed eye of Night be come  
 Then we must dare, by all ways foul or fine,  
 To thieve that wondrous Image from its shrine.  
 Ah, see ; far up, between each pair of beams  
 A hollow one might creep through ! Danger  
     gleams  
 Like sunshine to a brave man's eyes, and fear  
 Of what may be is no help anywhere.

## ORESTES.

Aye ; we have never braved these leagues of way  
 To falter at the end. See, I obey  
 Thy words. They are ever wise. Let us go  
     mark  
 Some cavern, to lie hid till fall of dark.  
 God will not suffer that bad things be stirred  
 To mar us now, and bring to naught the word  
 Himself hath spoke. Aye, and no peril brings  
 Pardon for turning back to sons of kings.

*[They go out towards the shore. After they  
 are gone, enter gradually the WOMEN  
 OF THE CHORUS.]*

## CHORUS.

Peace ! Peace upon all who dwell  
 By the Sister Rocks that clash in the swell  
     Of the Friendless Seas.

O Child of Leto, thou,  
 Dictynna mountain-born,  
 To the cornice gold-inlaid  
 To the pillared sanctities,  
 We come in the cold of morn,  
 We come with virgin brow,  
 Pure as our oath was sworn,  
 Handmaids of thine handmaid  
 Who holdeth the stainless keys.

From Hellas, that once was ours,  
 We come before thy gate,  
 From the land of the western seas,  
 The horses and the towers,  
 The wells and the garden trees,  
 And the seats where our fathers sate.

LEADER.

What tidings, ho? With what intent  
 Hast called me to thy shrine and thee,  
 O child of him who crossed the sea  
 To Troy with that great armament,  
 The thousand prows, the myriad swords?  
 I come, O child of Atreid Lords.

[IPHIGENIA, *followed by ATTENDANTS,*  
*comes from the Temple.*

IPHIGENIA.

Alas, O maidens mine,  
 I am filled full of tears :  
 My heart filled with the beat  
 Of tears, as of dancing feet,

A lyreless joyless line,  
And music meet for the dead.

For a whisper is in mine ears,  
By visions borne on the breath  
Of the Night that now is fled,  
Of a brother gone to death.  
Oh sorrow and weeping sore,  
For the house that no more is,  
For the dead that were kings of yore  
And the labour of Argolis !

*[She begins the Funeral Rite.]*

O Spirit, thou unknown,  
Who bearest on dark wings  
My brother, my one, mine own,  
I bear drink-offerings,  
And the cup that bringeth ease  
Flowing through Earth's deep breast ;  
Milk of the mountain kine,  
The hallowed gleam of wine,  
The toil of murmuring bees :  
By these shall the dead have rest.

*To an ATTENDANT.*

The golden goblet let me pour,  
And that which Hades thirsteth for.

O branch of Agamemnon's tree  
Beneath the earth, as to one dead,  
This cup of love I pour to thee.  
Oh, pardon, that I may not shed

One lock of hair to wreathe thy tomb,  
 One tear : so far, so far am I  
 From what to me and thee was home,  
 And where in all men's fantasy,  
 Butchered, O God ! I also lie.

CHORUS.

Woe ; woe : I too with reflux melody,  
 An echo wild of the dirges of the Asian,  
 I, thy bond maiden, cry to answer thee :  
 The music that lieth hid in lamentation,  
 The song that is heard in the deep hearts of the dead,  
 That the Lord of dead men 'mid his dancing  
     singeth,  
 And never joy-cry, never joy it bringeth ;  
 Woe for the house of Kings in desolation,  
 Woe for the light of the sceptre vanishèd.

From kings in Argos of old, from joyous kings,  
     The beginning came :  
 Then peril swift upon peril, flame on flame :  
 The dark and wheeling coursers, as wild with wings,  
 The cry of one betrayed on a drowning shore,  
 The sun that blanched in heaven, the world that  
     changed—  
 Evil on evil and none alone !—deranged  
 By the Golden Lamb and the wrong grown ever more ;  
 Blood following blood, sorrow on sorrow sore !  
 So come the dead of old, the dead in wrath,  
 Back on the seed of the high Tantalidae ;  
 Surely the Spirit of Life an evil path  
     Hath hewed for thee.

## IPHIGENIA.

From the beginning the Spirit of my life  
Was an evil spirit. Alas for my mother's zone,  
And the night that bare me ! From the beginning  
Strife,  
As a book to read, Fate gave me for mine own.  
They wooed a bride for the strikers down of Troy—  
Thy first-born, Mother : was it for this, thy prayer ?—  
A hind of slaughter to die in a father's snare,  
Gift of a sacrifice where none hath joy.

They set me on a royal wain ;  
Down the long sand they led me on,  
A bride new-decked, a bride of bane,  
In Aulis to the Nereid's son.  
And now estranged for evermore  
Beyond the far estranging foam  
I watch a flat and herbless shore,  
Unloved, unchilded, without home  
Or city : never more to meet  
For Hera's dance with Argive maids,  
Nor round the loom 'mid singing sweet  
Make broideries and storied braids,  
Of writhing giants overthrown  
And clear-eyed Pallas. . . . All is gone !  
Red hands and ever-ringing ears :  
The blood of men that friendless die,  
The horror of the strangers' cry  
Unheard, the horror of their tears.

But now, let even that have rest :  
I weep for him in Argos slain,

The brother whom I knew, Ah me,  
A babe, a flower ; and yet to be—  
There on his mother's arms and breast—  
The crowned Orestes, lord of men !

LEADER OF THE CHORUS.

Stay, yonder from some headland of the sea  
There comes—methinks a herdsman, seeking thee.

*Enter a HERDSMAN. IPHIGENIA is still on her knees.*

HERDSMAN.

Daughter of Clytemnestra and her king,  
Give ear ! I bear news of a wondrous thing.

IPHIGENIA.

What news, that should so mar my obsequies ?

HERDSMAN.

A ship hath passed the blue Symplêgades,  
And here upon our coast two men are thrown,  
Young, bold, good slaughter for the altar-stone  
Of Artemis ! *[She rises.]*

Make all the speed ye may ;  
'Tis not too much. The blood-bowl and the spray !

IPHIGENIA.

Men of what nation ? Doth their habit show ?

HERDSMAN.

Hellenes for sure, but that is all we know.

IPHIGENIA.

No name? No other clue thine ear could seize?

HERDSMAN.

We heard one call his comrade "Pylades."

IPHIGENIA.

Yes. And the man who spoke—his name was what?

HERDSMAN.

None of us heard. I think they spoke it not.

IPHIGENIA.

How did ye see them first, how make them fast?

HERDSMAN.

Down by the sea, just where the surge is cast. . . .

IPHIGENIA.

The sea? What is the sea to thee and thine?

HERDSMAN.

We came to wash our cattle in the brine.

IPHIGENIA.

Go back, and tell how they were taken; show  
The fashion of it, for I fain would know  
All.—'Tis so long a time, and never yet,  
Never, hath Greek blood made this altar wet.

HERDSMAN.

We had brought our forest cattle where the seas  
Break in long tides from the Symplêgades.



A bay is there, deep eaten by the surge  
And hollowed clear, with cover by the verge  
Where purple-fishers camp. These twain were there  
When one of mine own men, a forager,  
Spied them, and tiptoed whispering back : "God save  
Us now ! Two things unearthly by the wave  
Sitting !" We looked, and one of pious mood  
Raised up his hands to heaven and praying stood :  
"Son of the white Sea Spirit, high in rule,  
Storm-lord Palaemon, Oh, be merciful :  
Or sit ye there the warrior twins of Zeus,  
Or something loved of Him, from whose great thews  
Was born the Nereids' fifty-fluted choir."

Another, flushed with folly and the fire  
Of lawless daring, laughed aloud and swore  
'Twas shipwrecked sailors skulking on the shore,  
Our rule and custom here being known, to slay  
All strangers. And most thought this was the way  
To follow, and seek out for Artemis  
The blood-gift of our people.

Just at this  
One of the strangers started from his seat,  
And stood, and upward, downward, with a beat  
His head went, and he groaned, and all his arm  
Trembled. Then, as a hunter gives alarm,  
He shrieked, stark mad and raving : "Pylades,  
Dost see her there ?—And there—Oh, no one sees !—  
A she-dragon of Hell, and all her head  
Agape with fangèd asps, to bite me dead.  
She hath no face, but somewhere from her cloak  
Bloweth a wind of fire and bloody smoke :  
The wings' beat fans it : in her arms, Ah see !  
My mother, dead grey stone, to cast on me

And crush. . . . Help, help ! They crowd on me  
behind. . . .”

No shapes at all were there. 'Twas his sick mind  
Which turned the herds that lowed and barking  
hounds

That followed, to some visionary sounds  
Of Furies. For ourselves, we did but sit  
And watch in silence, wondering if the fit  
Would leave him dead. When suddenly out shone  
His sword, and like a lion he leaped upon  
Our herds, to fight his Furies ! Flank and side  
He stabbed and smote them, till the foam was dyed  
Red at the waves' edge. Marry, when we saw  
The cattle hurt and falling, no more law  
We gave, but sprang to arms and blew the horn  
For help—so strong they looked and nobly born  
For thralls like us to meet, that pair unknown.

Well, a throng gathered ere much time was gone ;  
When suddenly the whirl of madness slips  
From off him and he falls, quite weak, his lips  
Dropping with foam. When once we saw him  
fall

So timely, we were at him one and all  
To pelt and smite. The other watched us come,  
But knelt and wiped those lips all dank with foam  
And tended the sick body, while he held  
His cloak's good web above him for a shield ;  
So cool he was to ward off every stone  
And all the while care for that stricken one.

Then rose the fallen man, calm now and grave,  
Looked, and saw battle bursting like a wave  
That bursts, and knew that peril close at hand  
Which now is come, and groaned. On every hand

We stood, and stoned and stoned, and ceased not. Aye,  
'Twas then we heard that fearful battle-cry :  
"Ho, Pylades, 'tis death ! But let it be  
A gallant death ! Draw sword and follow me."

When those two swords came flashing, up the glen  
Through the loose rocks we scattered back ; but when  
One band was flying, down by rocks and trees  
Came others pelting : did they turn on these,  
Back stole the first upon them, stone on stone.  
'Twas past belief : of all those shots not one  
Struck home. The goddess kept her fated prey  
Perfect. Howbeit, at last we made our way  
Right, left and round behind them on the sands,  
And rushed, and beat the swords out of their hands,  
So tired they scarce could stand. Then to the king  
We bore them both, and he, not tarrying,  
Sends them to thee, to touch with holy spray—  
And then the blood-bowl !

I have heard thee pray,  
Priestess, ere now for such a draft as this.  
Aye, slay but these two chiefs to Artemis  
And Hellas shall have paid thy debt, and know  
What blood was spilt in Aulis long ago.

#### LEADER.

I marvel that one mad, whoe'er he be,  
Should sail from Hellas to the Friendless Sea.

#### IPHIGENIA.

'Tis well. Let thy hand bring them, and mine own  
Shall falter not till here God's will be done.

[*Exit* HERDSMAN.]

O suffering heart, not fierce thou wast of old  
To shipwrecked men. Nay, pities manifold  
Held thee in fancy homeward, lest thy hand  
At last should fall on one of thine own land.  
But now, for visions that have turned to stone  
My heart, to know Orestes sees the sun  
No more, a cruel woman waits you here,  
Whoe'er ye be, and one without a tear.

'Tis true : I know by mine own evil will :  
One long in pain, if things more suffering still  
Fall to his hand, will hate them for his own  
Torment. . . . And no great wind hath ever blown,  
No ship from God hath passed the Clashing Gate,  
To bring me Helen, who hath earned my hate,  
And Menelaus, till I mocked their prayers  
In this new Aulis, that is mine, not theirs :  
Where Greek hands held me lifted, like a beast  
For slaughter, and my throat bled. And the priest  
My father ! . . . Not one pang have I forgot.

Ah me, the blind half-prisoned arms I shot  
This way and that, to find his beard, his knees,  
Groping and wondering : "Father, what are these  
For bridal rites ? My mother even now  
Mid Argive women sings for me, whom thou . . .  
What dost thou ? She sings happy songs, and all  
Is dance and sound of piping in the hall ;  
And here. . . . Is he a vampyre, is he one  
That fattens on the dead, thy Peleus' son—  
Whose passion shaken like a torch before  
My leaping chariot, lured me to this shore  
To wed—"

Ah me ! And I had hid my face,  
Burning, behind my veil. I would not press

Orestes to my arms . . . who now is slain ! . . .  
 I would not kiss my sister's lips again,  
 For shame and fulness of the heart to meet  
 My bridegroom. All my kisses, all my sweet  
 Words were stored up and hid : I should come  
     back  
 So soon to Argos !

                    And thou, too : alack,  
 Brother, if dead thou art, from what high things  
 Thy youth is outcast, and the pride of kings  
 Fallen !

            And this the goddess deemeth good !  
 If ever mortal hand be dark with blood ;  
 Nay, touch a new-made mother or one slain  
 In war, her ban is on him. 'Tis a stain  
 She driveth from her outer walls ; and then  
 Herself doth drink this blood of slaughtered men ?  
 Could ever Leto, she of the great King  
 Beloved, be mother to so gross a thing ?  
 These tales be lies, false as those feastings wild  
 Of Tantalus and Gods that tore a child.  
 This land of murderers to its god hath given  
 Its own lust ; evil dwelleth not in heaven.

*[She goes into the Temple.]*

### CHORUS.

Dark of the sea, dark of the sea,	<i>[Strophe 1.]</i>
Gates of the warring water,	
One, in the old time, conquered you,	
A wingèd passion that burst the blue,	
When the West was shut and the Dawn lay free	
To the pain of Inachus' daughter.	

But who be these, from where the rushes blow  
On pale Eurôtas, from pure Dirce's flow,  
That turn not neither falter,  
Seeking Her land, where no man breaketh bread,  
Her without pity, round whose virgin head  
Blood on the pillars rusts from long ago,  
Blood on the ancient altar.

---

[*Antistrophe* 1.]

A flash of the foam, a flash of the foam,  
A wave on the oarblade welling,  
And out they passed to the heart of the blue :  
A chariot shell that the wild winds drew.  
Is it for passion of gold they come,  
Or pride to make great their dwelling ?

For sweet is Hope, yea, to much mortal woe  
So sweet that none may turn from it nor go,  
Whom once the far voice calleth,  
To wander through fierce peoples and the gleam  
Of desolate seas, in every heart a dream :  
And these she maketh empty die, and, lo,  
To that man's hand she falleth.

---

[*Strophe* 2.]

Through the Clashing Rocks they burst :  
They passed by the Cape unsleeping  
Of Phineus' sons accurst :  
They ran by the star-lit bay  
Upon magic surges sweeping,  
Where folk on the waves astray  
Have seen, through the gleaming grey,  
Ring behind ring, men say,  
The dance of the old Sea's daughters.

h me !

What mother then was yours, O strangers, say,  
 and father ? And your sister, if you have  
 sister : both at once, so young and brave  
 to leave her brotherless ! Who knows when heaven  
 may send that fortune ? For to none is given  
 to know the coming nor the end of woe ;  
 so dark is God, and to great darkness go  
 his paths, by blind chance mazèd from our ken.  
 Whence are ye come, O most unhappy men ?  
 from some far home, methinks, ye have found this  
 shore

And far shall stay from home for evermore.

#### ORESTES.

Why weepst thou, woman, to make worse the smart  
 Of that which needs must be, whoe'er thou art ?  
 count it not for gentleness, when one  
 Who means to slay, seeks first to make undone  
 By pity that sharp dread. Nor praise I him,  
 With hope long dead, who sheddeth tears to dim  
 The pain that grips him close. The evil so  
 is doubled into twain. He doth but show  
 His feeble heart, and, as he must have died,  
 Dies.—Let ill fortune float upon her tide  
 And weep no more for us. What way this land  
 Worships its god we know and understand.

#### IPHIGENIA.

Say first . . . which is it men call Pylades ?

#### ORESTES.

'Tis this man's name, if that will give thee ease.

IPHIGENIA.

From what walled town of Hellas cometh he ?

ORESTES.

Enough !—How would the knowledge profit thee

IPHIGENIA.

Are ye two brethren of one mother born ?

ORESTES.

No, not in blood. In love we are brothers sworn.

IPHIGENIA.

Thou also hast a name : tell me thereof.

ORESTES.

Call me Unfortunate. 'Tis name enough.

IPHIGENIA.

I asked not that. Let that with Fortune lie.

ORESTES.

Fools cannot laugh at them that nameless die.

IPHIGENIA.

Why grudge me this ? Hast thou such mighty fame ?

ORESTES.

My body, if thou wilt, but not my name.



A  
V IPHIGENIA.

A or yet the land of Greece where thou wast bred ?  
A

T  
M ORESTES.

T hat gain to have told it thee, when I am dead ?  
S

H  
H IPHIGENIA.

F ay : why shouldst thou deny so small a grace ?

A  
ORESTES.

K now then, great Argos was my native place.

IPHIGENIA.

St ranger ! The truth ! . . . From Argos art thou  
come ?

ORESTES.

M ycenae, once a rich land, was my home.

IPHIGENIA.

'T is banishment that brings thee here—or what ?

ORESTES.

A kind of banishment, half forced, half sought.

IPHIGENIA.

Wouldst thou but tell me all I need of thee !

ORESTES.

'Twere not much added to my misery.

IPHIGENIA.

From Argos ! . . . Oh, how sweet to see thee here !

ORESTES.

Enjoy it, then. To me 'tis sorry cheer.

IPHIGENIA.

Thou knowst the name of Troy ? Far doth it flit.

ORESTES.

Would God I had not ; nay, nor dreamed of it.

IPHIGENIA.

Men fable it is fallen beneath the sword ?

ORESTES.

Fallen it is. Thou hast heard no idle word.

IPHIGENIA.

Fallen ! At last !—And Helen taken too ?

ORESTES.

Aye ; on an evil day for one I knew.

IPHIGENIA.

Where is she? I too have some anger stored. . . .

ORESTES.

In Sparta! Once more happy with her lord!

IPHIGENIA.

Oh, hated of all Greece, not only me!

ORESTES.

I too have tasted of her wizardry.

IPHIGENIA.

And came the armies home, as the tales run?

ORESTES.

To answer that were many tales in one.

IPHIGENIA.

Oh, give me this hour full! Thou wilt soon die.

ORESTES.

Ask, if such longing holds thee. I will try.

IPHIGENIA.

A seer called Calchas! Did he ever come . . .?

ORESTES.

Calchas is dead, as the news went at home.

IPHIGENIA.

Good news, ye gods!—Odysseus, what of him?

ORESTES.

Not home yet, but still living, as men deem.

IPHIGENIA.

Curse him! And may he see his home no more.

ORESTES.

Why curse him? All his house is stricken sore.

IPHIGENIA.

How hath the Nereid's son, Achilles, sped?

ORESTES.

Small help his bridal brought him! He is dead.

IPHIGENIA.

A false fierce bridal, so the sufferers tell!

ORESTES.

Who art thou, questioning of Greece so well?

IPHIGENIA.

I was Greek. Evil caught me long ago.

ORESTES.

Small wonder, then, thou hast such wish to know.

IPHIGENIA.

That war-lord, whom they call so high in bliss. . . .

ORESTES.

None such is known to me. What name was his?

IPHIGENIA.

They called him Agamemnon, Atreus' son.

ORESTES.

I know not. Cease.—My questioning is done.

IPHIGENIA.

'Twill be such joy to me! How fares he? Tell!

ORESTES.

Dead. And hath wrecked another's life as well.

IPHIGENIA.

Dead? By what dreadful fortune? Woe is me!

ORESTES.

Why sighst thou? Had he any link with thee?

IPHIGENIA.

I did but think of his old joy and pride.

ORESTES.

His own wife foully stabbed him, and he died.

IPHIGENIA.

O God !

I pity her that slew . . . and him that slew.

ORESTES.

Now cease thy questions. Add no word thereto.

IPHIGENIA.

But one word. Lives she still, that hapless wife ?

ORESTES.

No. Her own son, her first-born, took her life.

IPHIGENIA.

O shipwrecked house ! What thought was in his  
brain ?

ORESTES.

Justice on her, to avenge his father slain.

IPHIGENIA.

Alas !

A bad false duty bravely hath he wrought.

ORESTES.

Yet God, for all his duty, helps him not.

IPHIGENIA.

And not one branch of Atreus' tree lives on ?

ORESTES.

Electra lives, unmated and alone.

IPHIGENIA.

The child they slaughtered . . . is there word of her ?

ORESTES.

Why, no, save that she died in Aulis there.

IPHIGENIA.

Poor child ! Poor father, too, who killed and lied !

ORESTES.

For a bad woman's worthless sake she died.

IPHIGENIA.

The dead king's son, lives he in Argos still ?

ORESTES.

He lives, now here, now nowhere, bent with ill.

IPHIGENIA.

O dreams, light dreams, farewell ! Ye too were lies.

## ORESTES.

Aye ; the gods too, whom mortals deem so wise,  
Are nothing clearer than some wingèd dream ;  
And all their ways, like man's ways, but a stream  
Of turmoil. He who cares to suffer least,  
Not blind, as fools are blinded, by a priest,  
Goes straight . . . to what death, those who know  
him know.

## LEADER.

We too have kinsmen dear, but, being low,  
None heedeth, live they still or live they not.

IPHIGENIA (*with sudden impulse*).

Listen ! For I am fallen upon a thought,  
Strangers, of some good use to you and me,  
Both. And 'tis thus most good things come to be,  
When different eyes hold the same way for fair.

Stranger, if I can save thee, wilt thou bear  
To Argos and the friends who loved my youth  
Some word ? There is a tablet which, in ruth  
For me and mine ill works, a prisoner wrote,  
Ta'en by the king in war. He knew 'twas not  
My will that craved for blood, but One on high  
Who holds it righteous her due prey shall die.  
And since that day no Greek hath ever come  
Whom I could save and send to Argos home  
With prayer for help to any friend : but thou,  
I think, dost loathe me not ; and thou dost know  
Mycenae and the names that fill my heart.  
Help me ! Be saved ! Thou also hast thy part,



Thy life for one light letter. . . . (ORESTES *looks at*  
PYLADES.) For thy friend,  
The Law compelleth. He must bear the end  
By Artemis ordained, apart from thee.

ORESTES.

Strange woman, as thou biddest let it be,  
Save one thing. 'Twere for me a heavy weight  
Should this man die. 'Tis I and mine own fate  
That steer our goings. He but sails with me  
Because I suffer much. It must not be  
That by his ruin I should 'scape mine own,  
And win thy grace withal. 'Tis simply done.  
Give him the tablet. He with faithful will  
Shall all thy hest in Argolis fulfil.  
And I . . . who cares may kill me. Vile is he  
Who leaves a friend in peril and goes free  
Himself. And, as it chances, this is one  
Right dear to me ; his life is as my own.

IPHIGENIA.

O royal heart ! Surely from some great seed  
This branch is born, that can so love indeed.  
God grant the one yet living of my race  
Be such as thou ! For not quite brotherless  
Am even I, save that I see him not,  
Strangers. . . . Howbeit, thy pleasure shall be wrought.  
This man shall bear the message, and thou go  
To death. So greatly thou wilt have it so !

ORESTES.

Where is the priest who does this cruelty ?

IPHIGENIA.

'Tis I. This altar's spell is over me.

ORESTES.

A grievous office and unblest, O maid.

IPHIGENIA.

What dare I do? The law must be obeyed.

ORESTES.

A girl to hold a sword and stab men dead!

IPHIGENIA.

I shall but sign the water on thy head.

ORESTES.

And who shall strike me, if I needs must ask?

IPHIGENIA.

There be within these vaults who know their task.

ORESTES.

My grave, when they have finished their desire?

IPHIGENIA.

A great gulf of the rock, and holy fire.

ORESTES.

Woe's me!

Would that my sister's hand could close mine eyes!

IPHIGENIA.

Alas, she dwelleth under distant skies,  
 Unhappy one, and vain is all thy prayer.  
 Yet, Oh, thou art from Argos : all of care  
 That can be, I will give and fail thee not.  
 Rich raiment to thy burial shall be brought,  
 And oil to cool thy pyre in golden floods,  
 And sweet that from a thousand mountain buds  
 The murmuring bee hath garnered, I will throw  
 To die with thee in fragrance. . . .

I must go

And seek the tablet from the Goddess' room  
 Within.—Oh, do not hate me for my doom !

Watch them, ye servitors, but leave them free.

It may be, past all hoping, it may be,  
 My word shall sail to Argos, to his hand  
 Whom most I love.    How joyous will he stand  
 To know, past hope, that here on the world's  
 rim

His dead are living, and cry out for him !

[*She goes into the Temple.*]

CHORUS.

Alas, we pity thee ; surely we pity thee :    [*Strophe.*]  
 Who art given over to the holy water,  
 The drops that fall deadly as drops of blood.

ORESTES.

I weep not, ye Greek maidens : but farewell,

## CHORUS.

[*Antistrophe.*]

Aye, and rejoice with thee ; surely rejoice with thee,  
 Thou happy rover from the place of slaughter ;  
 Thy foot shall stand again where thy father's  
 stood.

## PYLADES.

While he I love must die ? 'Tis miserable.

*Divers Women of the* CHORUS.

- A.* Alas, the deathward faring of the lost !  
*B.* Woe, woe ; thou too shalt move to misery.  
*C.* Which one shall suffer most ?  
*D.* My heart is torn by two words evenly,  
 For thee should I most sorrow, or for thee ?

## ORESTES.

By heaven, is t h y thought, Pylades, like mine ?

## PYLADES.

O friend, I cannot speak.—But what is thine ?

## ORESTES.

Who can the damsel be ? How Greek her tone  
 Of question, all of Ilion overthrown,  
 And how the kings came back, the wizard flame  
 Of Calchas, and Achilles' mighty name,

And ill-starred Agamemnon. With a keen  
Pity she spoke, and asked me of his queen  
And children. . . . The strange woman comes from  
there

By race, an Argive maid.—What aileth her  
With tablets, else, and questionings as though  
Her own heart beat with Argos' joy or woe?

PYLADES.

Thy speech is quicker, friend, else I had said  
The same; though surely all men visited  
By ships have heard the fall of the great kings.  
But let that be: I think of other things. . . .

ORESTES.

What? If thou hast need of me, let it be said.

PYLADES.

I cannot live for shame if thou art dead.  
I sailed together with thee; let us die  
Together. What a coward slave were I,  
Creeping through Argos and from glen to glen  
Of wind-torn Phocian hills! And most of men—  
For most are bad—will whisper how one day  
I left my friend to die and made my way  
Home. They will say I watched the sinking breath  
Of thy great house and plotted for thy death  
To wed thy sister, climb into thy throne. . . .  
I dread, I loathe it.—Nay, all ways but one  
Are shut. My last breath shall go forth with thine,  
Thy bloody sword, thy gulf of fire be mine  
Also. I love thee and I dread men's scorn.

## ORESTES.

Peace from such thoughts! My burden can be borne ;

But where one pain sufficeth, double pain  
I will not bear. Nay, all that scorn and stain  
That fright thee, on mine own head worse would be  
If I brought death on him who toiled for me.

It is no bitter thing for such an one  
As God will have me be, at last to have done  
With living. Thou art happy ; thy house lies  
At peace with God, unstained in men's eyes ;  
Mine is all evil fate and evil life. . . .

Nay, thou once safe, my sister for thy wife—  
So we agreed :—in sons of hers and thine  
My name will live, nor Agamemnon's line  
Be blurred for ever like an evil scroll.

Back ! Rule thy land ! Let life be in thy soul !  
And when thou art come to Hellas, and the plain  
Of Argos where the horsemen ride, again—  
Give me thy hand !—I charge thee, let there be  
Some death-mound and a graven stone for me.  
My sister will go weep thereat, and shear  
A tress or two. Say how I ended here,  
Slain by a maid of Argolis, beside  
God's altar, in mine own blood purified.

And fare thee well. I have no friend like thee

For truth and love, O boy that played with me,  
And hunted on Greek hills, O thou on whom  
Hath lain the hardest burden of my doom !  
Farewell. The Prophet and the Lord of Lies  
Hath done his worst. Far out from Grecian skies

With craft forethought he driveth me, to die  
Where none may mark how ends his prophecy !  
I trusted in his word. I gave him all  
My heart. I slew my mother at his call ;  
For which things now he casts me here to die.

# PYLADES.

Thy tomb shall fail thee not. Thy sister I  
Will guard for ever. I, O stricken sore,  
Who loved thee living and shall love thee more  
Dead. But for all thou standest on the brink,  
God's promise hath not yet destroyed thee. Think !  
How oft, how oft the darkest hour of ill  
Breaks brightest into dawn, if Fate but will !

# ORESTES.

Enough. Nor god nor man can any more  
Aid me. The woman standeth at the door.

*Enter IPHIGENIA from the Temple.*

# IPHIGENIA.

Go ye within ; and have all things of need  
In order set for them that do the deed.  
There wait my word. [ATTENDANTS *go in.*  
Ye strangers, here I hold  
The many-lettered tablet, fold on fold.  
Yet . . . one thing still. No man, once unafraid  
And safe, remembereth all the vows he made

In fear of death. My heart misgiveth me,  
Lest he who bears my tablet, once gone free,  
Forget me here and set my charge at naught.

ORESTES.

What wouldst thou, then ? Thou hast some troubling  
thought.

IPHIGENIA.

His sworn oath let him give, to bear this same  
Tablet to Argos, to the friend I name.

ORESTES.

And if he give this oath, wilt thou swear too ?

IPHIGENIA.

What should I swear to do or not to do ?

ORESTES.

Send him from Tauris safe and free from ill.

IPHIGENIA.

I promise. How else could he do my will ?

ORESTES.

The King will suffer this ?

IPHIGENIA.

Yes : I can bend  
The King, and set upon his ship thy friend.



ORESTES.

Choose then what oath is best, and he will swear.

IPHIGENIA (*to PYLADES, who has come up to her*).

Say : "To thy friend this tablet I will bear."

PYLADES (*taking the tablet*).

Good. I will bear this tablet to thy friend.

IPHIGENIA.

And I save thee beyond this kingdom's end.

PYLADES.

What god dost thou invoke to witness this ?

IPHIGENIA.

Her in whose house I labour, Artemis.

PYLADES.

And I the Lord of Heaven, eternal Zeus.

IPHIGENIA.

And if thou fail me, or thine oath abuse . . . ?

PYLADES.

May I see home no more. And thou, what then ?

IPHIGENIA.

May this foot never tread Greek earth again.

PYLADES.

But stay : there is one chance we have forgot.

IPHIGENIA.

A new oath can be sworn, if this serve not.

PYLADES.

In one case set me free. Say I be crossed  
With shipwreck, and, with ship and tablet lost  
And all I bear, my life be saved alone :  
Let not this oath be held a thing undone,  
To curse me.

IPHIGENIA.

Nay, then, many ways are best  
To many ends. The words thou carriest  
Enrolled and hid beneath that tablet's rim,  
I will repeat to thee, and thou to him  
I look for. Safer so. If the scrip sail  
Unhurt to Greece, itself will tell my tale  
Unaided : if it drown in some wide sea,  
Save but thyself, my words are saved with thee.

PYLADES.

For thy sake and for mine 'tis fairer so.  
Now let me hear his name to whom I go  
In Argolis, and how my words should run.

IPHIGENIA (*repeating the words by heart*).

Say : "To Orestes, Agamemnon's son,  
She that was slain in Aulis, dead to Greece  
Yet quick, Iphigenia sendeth peace :"

ORESTES.

Iphigenia ! Where ? Back from the dead ?

IPHIGENIA.

'Tis I. But speak not, lest thou break my thread.--  
"Take me to Argos, brother, ere I die,  
Back from the Friendless Peoples and the high  
Altar of Her whose bloody rites I wreak."

ORESTES (*aside*).

Where am I, Pylades ? How shall I speak ?

IPHIGENIA.

"Else one in grief forsaken shall, like shame,  
Haunt thee."

PYLADES (*aside*).

Orestes !

IPHIGENIA (*overhearing him*).

Yes : that is the name.

PYLADES.

Ye Gods above !

IPHIGENIA.

Why callest thou on God  
For words of mine ?

PYLADES.

'Tis nothing. 'Twas a road  
My thoughts had turned. Speak on.—No need  
for us  
To question ; we shall hear things marvellous.

IPHIGENIA.

Tell him that Artemis my soul did save,  
I wot not how, and to the altar gave  
A fawn instead ; the which my father slew,  
Not seeing, deeming that the sword he drew  
Struck me. But she had borne me far away  
And left me in this land.—I charge thee, say  
So much. It all is written on the scroll.

PYLADES.

An easy charge thou layest on my soul,  
A glad oath on thine own. I wait no more,  
But here fulfil the service that I swore.

Orestes, take this tablet which I bear  
To thine own hand, thy sister's messenger.

ORESTES.

I take it, but I reck not of its scrip  
Nor message. Too much joy is at my lip.

Sister ! Belovèd ! Wildered though I be,  
 My arms believe not, yet they crave for thee.  
 Now, filled with wonder, give me my delight !  
     *[He goes to embrace her. She stands speechless.]*

LEADER.

Stranger, forbear ! No living man hath right  
 To touch that robe. The Goddess were defiled !

ORESTES.

O Sister mine, O my dead father's child,  
 Agamemnon's child ; take me and have no fear,  
 Beyond all dreams 'tis I thy brother here.

IPHIGENIA.

My brother ? Thou ? . . . Peace ! Mock at me  
     no more.  
 Argos is bright with him and Nauplia's shore.

ORESTES.

Unhappy one ! Thou hast no brother there.

IPHIGENIA.

Orestes . . . thou ? Whom Clytemnestra bare ?

ORESTES.

To Atreus' firstborn son, thy sire and mine.

IPHIGENIA.

Thou sayst it : Oh, give me some proof, some sign !

ORESTES.

What sign thou wilt. Ask anything from home.

IPHIGENIA.

Nay, t h o u speak : 'tis from thee the sign should come.

ORESTES.

That will I.—First, old tales Electra told.  
Thou knowst how Pelops' princes warred of old ?

IPHIGENIA.

I know : the Golden Lamb that wrought their doom.

ORESTES.

Thine own hand wove that story on the loom. . . .

IPHIGENIA.

How sweet ! Thou movest near old memories.

ORESTES.

With a great Sun back beaten in the skies.

IPHIGENIA.

Fine linen threads I used. The memories come.

ORESTES.

And mother gave thee shrift-water from home  
For Aulis. . . .

IPHIGENIA.

I remember. Not so fair  
A day did drink that water !

ORESTES.

And thine hair  
They brought us for thy dying gift, and gave  
To mother.

IPHIGENIA.

Yes : for record on the grave  
I sent it, where this head should never lie.

ORESTES.

Another token, seen of mine own eye.  
The ancient lance that leapt in Pelops' hand,  
To win his bride, the virgin of the land,  
And smite Oenomaus, in thy chamber hid. . . .

IPHIGENIA (*falling into his arms*).

Belovèd ! Oh, no other, for indeed  
Belovèd art thou ! In mine arms at last,  
Orestes far away.

ORESTES.

And thou in mine, the evil dreaming past,  
Back from the dead this day !  
Yet through the joy tears, tears and sorrow loud  
Are o'er mine eyes and thine eyes, like a cloud.

IPHIGENIA.

Is this the babe I knew,  
The little babe, light lifted like a bird ?  
O heart of mine, too blest for any word,  
What shall I say or do ?  
Beyond all wonders, beyond stories heard,  
This joy is here and true.

ORESTES.

Could we but stay thus joined for evermore !

IPHIGENIA.

A joy is mine I may not understand,  
Friends, and a fear, lest sudden from my hand  
This dream will melt and soar  
Up to the fiery skies from whence it came.  
O Argos land, O hearth and holy flame  
That old Cyclôpes lit,  
I bless ye that he lives, that he is grown,  
A light and strength, my brother and mine own ;  
I bless your name for it.

ORESTES.

One blood we are ; so much is well. But Fate,  
Sister, hath not yet made us fortunate.



IPHIGENIA.

O most unfortunate ! Did I not feel,  
Whose father, misery-hearted, at my bare  
Throat held the steel ?

ORESTES.

Woe's me ! Methinks even now I see thee there.

IPHIGENIA.

No love-song of Achilles ! Crafty arms  
Drew me to that cold sleep,  
And tears, blind tears amid the altar psalms  
And noise of them that weep—  
That was my cleansing !

ORESTES.

My heart too doth bleed,  
To think our father wrought so dire a deed.

IPHIGENIA.

My life hath known no father. Any road  
To any end may run,  
As god's will drives ; else. . . .

ORESTES.

Else, unhappy one,  
Thyself had spilt this day thy brother's blood !

## IPHIGENIA.

Ah God, my cruel deed ! . . . 'Twas horrible.  
'Twas horrible. . . . O brother ! Did my heart  
Endure it ? . . . And things fell  
Right by so frail a chance ; and here thou art.

Bloody my hand had been,

My heart heavy with sin.

And now, what end cometh ?

Shall Chance yet comfort me,

Finding a way for thee

Back from the Friendless Strand,

Back from the place of death—

Ere yet the slayers come

And thy blood sink in the sand—

Home unto Argos, home ? . . .

Hard heart, so swift to slay,

Is there to life no way ? . . .

No ship ! . . . And how by land ? . . .

A rush of feet

Out to the waste alone.

Nay : 'twere to meet

Death, amid tribes unknown

And trackless ways of the waste. . . .

Surely the sea were best.

Back by the narrow bar

To the Dark Blue Gate ! . . .

Ah God, too far, too far ! . . .

Desolate ! Desolate !

What god or man, what unimagined flame,

Can cleave this road where no road is, and bring

To us last wrecks of Agamemnon's name,

Peace from long suffering ?

## LEADER.

Lo, deeds of wonder and beyond surmise,  
Not as tales told, but seen of mine own eyes.

## PYLADES.

Men that have found the arms of those they love  
Would fain long linger in the joy thereof.  
But we, Orestes, have no respite yet  
For tears or tenderness. Let us forget  
All but the one word Freedom, calling us  
To live, not die by altars barbarous.  
Think not of joy in this great hour, nor lose  
Fortune's first hold. Not thus do wise men use.

## ORESTES.

I think that Fortune watcheth o'er our lives,  
Surer than we. But well said : he who strives  
Will find his gods strive for him equally.

## IPHIGENIA.

He shall not check us so, nor baffle me  
Of this one word. How doth Electra move  
Through life ? Ye twain are all I have to love.

## ORESTES.

A wife and happy : this man hath her hand.

## IPHIGENIA.

And what man's son is he, and of what land ?

ORESTES.

Son of King Strophios he is called of men.

IPHIGENIA.

Whom Atreus' daughter wed ?—My kinsman then.

ORESTES.

Our cousin, and my true and only friend.

IPHIGENIA.

He was not born, when I went to mine end.

ORESTES.

No, Strophios had no child for many a year.

IPHIGENIA.

I give thee hail, husband of one so dear.

ORESTES.

My more than kinsman, saviour in my need !

IPHIGENIA.

But mother. . . . Speak : how did ye dare that deed ?

ORESTES.

Our father's wrongs. . . . But let that story be.

IPHIGENIA.

And she to slay her king ! What cause had she ?

ORESTES.

Forget her ! . . . And no tale for thee it is.

IPHIGENIA.

So be it.—And thou art Lord of Argolis ?

ORESTES.

Our uncle rules. I walk an exile's ways.

IPHIGENIA.

Doth he so trample on our fallen days ?

ORESTES.

Nay : there be those that drive me, Shapes of Dread.

IPHIGENIA.

Ah !  
That frenzy on the shore ! 'Tis as they said. . . .

ORESTES.

They saw me in mine hour. It needs must be.

IPHIGENIA.

'Twas our dead mother's Furies hounding thee !

ORESTES.

My mouth is bloody with the curb they ride.

IPHIGENIA.

What brought thee here beyond the Friendless Tide ?

ORESTES.

What leads me everywhere—Apollo's word.

IPHIGENIA.

Seeking what end ?—Or may the tale be heard ?

ORESTES.

Nay, I can tell thee all. It needs must be  
The whole tale of my days of misery.

When this sore evil that we speak not of  
Lit on my hand, this way and that they drove  
My body, till the God by diverse paths  
Led me to Athens, that the nameless Wraths  
Might bring me before judgment. For that land  
A pure tribunal hath, where Ares' hand,  
Red from an ancient stain, by Zeus was sent  
For justice. Thither came I; and there went  
God's hate before me, that at first no man  
Would give me shelter. Then some few began  
To pity, and set out for me aloof  
One table. There I sate within their roof,  
But without word they signed to me, as one  
Apart, unspoken to, unlooked upon,

Lest touch of me should stain their meat and sup.  
 And every man in measure filled his cup  
 And gave me mine, and took their joy apart,  
 While I sat silent ; for I had no heart  
 To upbraid the hosts that fed me. On I wrought  
 In my deep pain, feigning to mark them not.

And now, men say, mine evil days are made  
 A rite among them and the cups are laid  
 Apart for each. The rule abideth still.

Howbeit, when I was come to Ares' Hill  
 They gave me judgment. On one stone I stood,  
 On one she that was eldest of the brood  
 That hunted me so long. And many a word  
 Touching my mother's death was spoke and heard,  
 Till Phoebus rose to save me. Even lay  
 The votes of Death and Life ; when, lo, a sway  
 Of Pallas' arm, and free at last I stood  
 From that death grapple. But the Shapes of Blood—  
 Some did accept the judgment, and of grace  
 Consent to make their house beneath that place  
 In darkness. Others still consented not,  
 But clove to me the more, like bloodhounds hot  
 On the dying ; till to Phoebus' house once more  
 I crept, and cast me starving on the floor  
 Facing the Holy Place, and made my cry :  
 "Lord Phoebus, here I am come, and here will die,  
 Unless thou save me, as thou hast betrayed."  
 And, lo, from out that dark and golden shade  
 A voice : "Go, seek the Taurian citadel :  
 Seize there the carven Artemis that fell  
 From heaven, and stablish it on Attic soil.  
 So comes thy freedom."

[IPHIGENIA *shrinks*.

Sister, in this toil

Help us !—If once that image I may win  
That day shall end my madness and my sin :  
And thou, to Argos o'er the sundering foam  
My many-oarèd barque shall bear thee home.

O sister loved and lost, O pitying face,  
Help my great peril ; help our father's race.  
For lost am I and perished all the powers  
Of Pelops, save that heavenly thing be ours !

LEADER.

Strange wrath of God hath fallen, like hot rain,  
On Tantalus' house : he leadeth them through  
pain.

IPHIGENIA.

Long ere you came my heart hath yearned to be  
In Argos, brother, and so near to thee :  
But now—thy will is mine. To ease thy pain,  
To lift our father's house to peace again,  
And hate no more my murderers—aye, 'tis good.  
Perchance to clean this hand that sought thy blood,  
And save my people . . .

But the goddess' eyes,  
How dream we to deceive them ? Or what wise  
Escape the King, when on his sight shall fall  
The blank stone of the empty pedestal ? . . .  
I needs must die. . . . What better can I do ?

And yet, one chance there is : could I but go  
Together with the image : couldst thou bear  
Both on the leaping seas ! The risk were fair.  
But how ?



Nay, I must wait then and be slain :  
 Thou shalt walk free in Argolis again,  
 And all life smile on thee. . . . Dearest, we need  
 Not shrink from that. I shall by mine own deed  
 Have saved thee. And a man gone from the earth  
 Is wept for. Women are but little worth.

ORESTES.

My mother and then thou ? It may not be.  
 This hand hath blood enough. I stand with thee  
 One-hearted here, be it for life or death,  
 And either bear thee, if God favoureth,  
 With me to Greece and home, or else lie here  
 Dead at thy side.—But mark me : if thou fear  
 Lest Artemis be wroth, how can that be ?  
 Hath not her brother's self commanded me  
 To bear to Greece her image ?—Oh, he knew  
 Her will ! He knew that in this land we two  
 Must meet once more. All that so far hath past  
 Doth show his work. He will not at the last  
 Fail. We shall yet see Argos, thou and I.

IPHIGENIA.

To steal for thee the image, yet not die  
 Myself ! 'Tis that we need. 'Tis that doth kill  
 My hope. Else. . . . Oh, God knows I have the  
 will !

ORESTES.

How if we slew your savage king ?

IPHIGENIA.

Ah, no :

He sheltered me, a stranger.

ORESTES.

Even so,

If it bring life for me and thee, the deed  
May well be dared.

IPHIGENIA.

I could not. . . . Nay ; indeed  
I thank thee for thy daring.

ORESTES.

Canst thou hide  
My body in the shrine ?

IPHIGENIA.

There to abide  
Till nightfall, and escape ?

ORESTES.

Even so ; the night  
Is the safe time for robbers, as the light  
For just men.

IPHIGENIA.

There be sacred watchers there  
Who needs must see us.

ORESTES.

Gods above !    What prayer  
Can help us then ?

IPHIGENIA.

I think I dimly see  
One chance.

ORESTES.

What chance ?    Speak out thy fantasy.

IPHIGENIA.

On thine affliction I would build my way.

ORESTES.

Women have strange devices.

IPHIGENIA.

I would say  
Thou com'st from Hellas with thy mother's blood  
Upon thee.

ORESTES.

Use my shame, if any good  
Will follow.

IPHIGENIA.

Therefore, an offence most high  
It were to slay thee to the goddess !

ORESTES.

Why ?

Though I half guess.

IPHIGENIA.

Thy body is unclean.—  
Oh, I will fill them with the fear of sin !

ORESTES.

What help is that for the Image ?

IPHIGENIA.

I will crave  
To cleanse thee in the breaking of the wave.

ORESTES.

That leaves the goddess still inside her shrine,  
And 'tis for her we sailed.

IPHIGENIA.

A touch of thine  
Defiled her. She too must be purified.

ORESTES.

Where shall it be? Thou knowest where the tide  
Sweeps up in a long channel?

IPHIGENIA.

Yes! And where  
Your ship, I guess, lies moored.

ORESTES.

Whose hand will bear—  
Should it be thine?—the image from her throne?

IPHIGENIA.

No hand of man may touch it save mine own.

ORESTES.

And Pylades—what part hath he herein?

IPHIGENIA.

The same as thine. He bears the self-same sin.

ORESTES.

How wilt thou work the plan—hid from the king  
Or known?

IPHIGENIA.

To hide it were a hopeless thing. . . .  
Oh, I will face him, make him yield to me.

ORESTES.

Well, fifty oars lie waiting on the sea.

IPHIGENIA.

Aye, there comes t h y work, till an end be made.

ORESTES.

Good. It needs only that these women aid  
Our secret. Do thou speak with them, and find  
Words of persuasion. Power is in the mind  
Of woman to wake pity.—For the rest,  
God knoweth : may it all end for the best !

IPHIGENIA.

O women, you my comrades, in your eyes  
I look to read my fate. In you it lies,  
That either I find peace, or be cast down  
To nothing, robbed for ever of mine own—  
Brother, and home, and sister pricelessly  
Beloved.—Are we not women, you and I,  
A broken race, to one another true,  
And strong in our shared secrets ? Help me through  
This strait ; keep hid the secret of our flight,  
And share our peril ! Honour shineth bright  
On her whose lips are steadfast. . . . Heaven  
above !

Three souls, but one in fortune, one in love,  
Thou seest us go—is it to death or home ?  
If home, then surely, surely, there shall come

Part of our joy to thee. I swear, I swear  
To aid thee also home. . . .

*[She goes to one after another, and presently  
kneels embracing the knees of the LEADER.]*

I make my prayer  
By that right hand ; to thee, too, by that dear  
Cheek ; by thy knees ; by all that is not here  
Of things beloved, by mother, father, child—  
Thou hadst a child !—How say ye ? Have ye smiled  
Or turned from me ? For if ye turn away,  
I and my brother are lost things this day.

LEADER.

Be of good heart, sweet mistress. Only go  
To happiness. No child of man shall know  
From us thy secret. Hear me, Zeus on high !

IPHIGENIA (*rising*).

God bless you for that word, and fill your eye  
With light !— *[Turning to ORESTES and PYLADES.]*

But now, to work ! Go thou, and thou,  
In to the deeper shrine. King Thoas now  
Should soon be here to question if the price  
Be yet paid of the strangers' sacrifice.

*[ORESTES and PYLADES go in.]*

Thou Holy One, that on the shrouded sand  
Of Aulis saved me from a father's hand  
Blood-maddened, save me now, and save these  
twain.

Else shall Apollo's lips, through thy disdain,  
Be no more true nor trusted in men's eyes.  
Come from the friendless shore, the cruel skies,

Come back : what mak'st thou here, when o'er the  
A clean and joyous land doth call for thee?

*[She follows the men into the Temple]*

CHORUS.

*[Strophe]*

Bird of the sea rocks, of the bursting spray,  
O halcyon bird,  
That wheelest crying, crying, on thy way ;  
Who knoweth grief can read the tale of thee :  
One love long lost, one song for ever heard  
And wings that sweep the sea.

Sister, I too beside the sea complain,  
A bird that hath no wing.  
Oh, for a kind Greek market-place again,  
For Artemis that healeth woman's pain ;  
Here I stand hungering.  
Give me the little hill above the sea,  
The palm of Delos fringed delicately,  
The young sweet laurel and the olive-tree  
Grey-leaved and glimmering ;  
O Isle of Leto, Isle of pain and love ;  
The Orbèd Water and the spell thereof ;  
Where still the Swan, minstrel of things to be,  
Doth serve the Muse and sing !

*[Antistrophe]*

Ah, the old tears, the old and blinding tears  
I gave God then,  
When my town fell, and noise was in mine ears  
Of crashing towers, and forth they guided me  
Through spears and lifted oars and angry men  
Out to an unknown sea.



They bought my flesh with gold, and sore afraid  
 I came to this dark East  
 To serve, in thrall to Agamemnon's maid,  
 This Huntress Artemis, to whom is paid  
 The blood of no slain beast ;  
 Yet all is bloody where I dwell, Ah me !  
 Envy, envying that misery  
 That through all life hath endured changelessly.  
 For hard things borne from birth  
 Take iron of man's heart, and hurt the less.  
 This change that paineth ; and the bitterness  
 Of life's decay when joy hath ceased to be  
 That makes dark all the earth.

Behold,

[*Strophe 2.*

Two score and ten there be  
 Rowers that row for thee,  
 And a wild hill air, as if Pan were there,  
 Shall sound on the Argive sea,  
 Piping to set thee free.

Or is it the stricken string  
 Of Apollo's lyre doth sing  
 Mournfully, as he guideth thee  
 To Athens, the land of spring ;  
 While I wait wearying ?

Oh, the wind and the oar,  
 When the great sail swells before,  
 With sheets astrain, like a horse on the rein ;  
 And on, through the race and roar,  
 She feels for the farther shore.

Ah me, [Antistrophe 2.  
To rise upon wings and hold  
Straight on up the steep of gold  
Where the joyous Sun in fire doth run,  
Till the wings should faint and fold  
O'er the house that was mine of old :

Or watch where the glade below  
With a marriage dance doth glow,  
And a child will glide from her mother's side  
Out, out, where the dancers flow :  
As I did, long ago.

Oh, battles of gold and rare  
Raiment and Starrèd hair,  
And bright veils crossed amid tresses tossed  
In a dusk of dancing air !  
O Youth and the days that were !

---

*Enter KING THOAS, with Soldiers.*

THOAS.

Where is the warden of this sacred gate,  
The Greek woman ? Is her work ended yet  
With those two strangers ? Do their bodies lie  
Aflame now in the rock-cleft sanctuary ?

LEADER.

Here is herself, O King, to give thee word.

*Enter, from the Temple, IPHIGENIA, carrying  
the Image on high.*

THOAS.

How, child of Agamemnon ! Hast thou stirred  
From her eternal base, and to the sun  
Bearest in thine own arms, the Holy One ?

IPHIGENIA.

Back, Lord ! No step beyond the pillared way.

THOAS.

But how ? Some rule is broken ?

IPHIGENIA.

I unsay

That word. Be all unspoken and unwrought !

THOAS.

What means this greeting strange? Disclose thy thought.

IPHIGENIA.

Unclean the prey was that ye caught, O King.

THOAS.

Who showed thee so? Thine own imagining?

IPHIGENIA.

The Image stirred and shuddered from its seat.

THOAS.

Itself? . . . Some shock of earthquake loosened it.

IPHIGENIA.

Itself. And the eyes closed one breathing space.

THOAS.

But why? For those two men's bloodguiltiness?

IPHIGENIA.

That, nothing else. For, Oh, their guilt is sore.

THOAS.

They killed some of my herdsmen on the shore?

IPHIGENIA.

Their sin was brought from home, not gathered here.

THOAS.

What? I must know this.—Make thy story clear.

IPHIGENIA. (*She puts the Image down and moves nearer to* THOAS.)

The men have slain their mother.

THOAS.

God !    And these  
Be Greeks !

IPHIGENIA.

They both are hunted out of Greece.

THOAS.

For this thou hast brought the Image to the sun ?

IPHIGENIA.

The fire of heaven can cleanse all malison.

THOAS.

How didst thou first hear of their deed of shame ?

IPHIGENIA.

When the Image hid its eyes, I questioned them.

THOAS.

Good.    Greece hath taught thee many a subtle art.

IPHIGENIA.

Ah, they too had sweet words to move my heart.

THOAS.

Sweet words ?    How, did they bring some news of  
Greece ?

IPHIGENIA.

Orestes, my one brother, lives in peace.

THOAS.

Surely! Good news to make thee spare their lives. . . .

IPHIGENIA.

My father too in Argos lives and thrives.

THOAS.

While thou didst think but of the goddess' laws!

IPHIGENIA.

Do I not hate all Greeks? Have I not cause?

THOAS.

Good cause. But now. . . . What service should  
be paid?

IPHIGENIA.

The Law of long years needs must be obeyed.

THOAS.

To work then, with thy sword and handwashing!

IPHIGENIA.

First I must shrive them with some cleansing thing.

THOAS.

What ? Running water, or the sea's salt spray ?

IPHIGENIA.

The sea doth wash all the world's ills away.

THOAS.

For sure. 'Twill make them cleaner for the knife.

IPHIGENIA.

And my hand, too, cleaner for all my life.

THOAS.

Well, the waves lap close by the temple floor.

IPHIGENIA.

We need a secret place. I must do more.

THOAS.

Some rite unseen ? 'Tis well. Go where thou wilt.

IPHIGENIA.

The Image likewise must be purged of guilt.

THOAS.

The stain hath touched it of that mother's  
blood?

IPHIGENIA.

I durst not move it else, from where it stood.

THOAS.

How good thy godliness and forethought! Aye,  
Small wonder all our people holds thee high.

IPHIGENIA.

Dost know then what I fain would have?

THOAS.

'Tis thine to speak and it shall be.

IPHIGENIA.

Put bondage on the strangers both. . . .

THOAS.

Why bondage? Whither can they flee?

IPHIGENIA.

Put not thy faith in any Greek.



THOAS (*to ATTENDANTS*).

Ho, men !    Some thongs and fetters, go !

IPHIGENIA.

Stay ; let them lead the strangers here, outside the  
shrine. . . .

THOAS.

It shall be so.

IPHIGENIA.

And lay dark raiment on their heads. . . .

THOAS.

To veil them, lest the Sun should see.

IPHIGENIA.

And lend me some of thine own spears.

THOAS.

This company shall go with thee.

IPHIGENIA.

Next, send through all the city streets a herald. . . .

THOAS.

Aye ; and what to say ?

IPHIGENIA.

That no man living stir abroad.

THOAS.

The stain of blood might cross their way.

IPHIGENIA.

Aye, sin like theirs doth spread contagion.

THOAS (*to an ATTENDANT*).

Forth, and publish my command. . . .

IPHIGENIA.

That none stir forth—nor look. . . .

THOAS.

Nor look.—How well thou carest for the land !

IPHIGENIA.

For one whom I am bound to love.

THOAS.

Indeed, I think thou hat'st me not.

IPHIGENIA.

And thou meanwhile, here at the temple, wait, O  
King, and . . .

THOAS.

Wait for what?

IPHIGENIA.

Purge all the shrine with fire.

THOAS.

'Twill all be clean before you come again.

IPHIGENIA.

And while the strangers pass thee close, seeking the  
sea. . . .

THOAS.

What wouldst thou then?

IPHIGENIA.

Put darkness on thine eyes.

THOAS.

Mine eyes might drink the evil of their crime?

IPHIGENIA.

And, should I seem to stay too long. . . .

THOAS.

Too long? How shall I judge the time?

IPHIGENIA.

Be not dismayed.

THOAS.

Perform thy rite all duly. We have time to spare.

IPHIGENIA.

And God but grant this cleansing end as I desire !

THOAS.

I join thy prayer.

IPHIGENIA.

The door doth open ! See, they lead the strangers  
from the cell within,

And raiment holy and young lambs, whose blood  
shall shrive the blood of Sin.

And, lo, the light of sacred fires, and things of secret  
power, arrayed

By mine own hand to cleanse aright the strangers, to  
cleanse Leto's Maid.

*[She takes up the Image again.]*

There passeth here a holy thing : begone, I charge  
ye, from the road,

O whoso by these sacred gates may dwell, hand-  
consecrate to God,

What man hath marriage in his heart, what woman  
goeth great with child,

Begone and tremble from this road : fly swiftly, lest  
ye be defiled.—

Queen and Virgin, Leto-born, have pity ! Let me  
 cleanse this stain,  
 And pray to thee where pray I would : a clean  
 house shall be thine again,  
 And we at last win happiness.—Behold, I speak but  
 as I dare ;  
 The rest. . . . Oh, God is wise, and thou, my  
 Mistress, thou canst read my prayer.

[*The procession passes out, THOAS and the by-standers veiled ; Attendants in front, then IPHIGENIA with the Image, then veiled Soldiers, then ORESTES and PYLADES bound, the bonds held by other veiled Soldiers following them. THOAS goes into the Temple.*]

CHORUS.

[*Strophe.*]

Oh, fair the fruits of Leto blow :  
 A Virgin, one, with joyous bow,  
 And one a Lord of flashing locks,  
 Wise in the harp, Apollo :  
 She bore them amid Delian rocks,  
 Hid in a fruited hollow.

But forth she fared from that low reef,  
 Sea-cradle of her joy and grief.  
 A crag she knew more near the skies  
 And lit with wilder water,  
 That leaps with joy of Dionyse :  
 There brought she son and daughter.

And there, behold, an ancient Snake,  
Wine-eyed, bronze-gleaming in the brake  
Of deep-leaved laurel, ruled the dell,  
Sent by old Earth from under  
Strange caves to guard her oracle—  
A thing of fear and wonder.

Thou, Phoebus, still a new-born thing,  
Meet in thy mother's arms to lie,  
Didst kill the Snake and crown thee king,  
In Pytho's land of prophecy :  
Thine was the tripod and the chair  
Of golden truth ; and thronèd there,  
Hard by the streams of Castaly,  
Beneath the untrodden portal  
Of Earth's mid stone there flows from thee  
Wisdom for all things mortal.

[*Antistrophe.*

He slew the Snake ; he cast, men say,  
Themis, the child of Earth, away  
From Pytho and her hallowed stream ;  
Then Earth, in dark derision,  
Brought forth the Peoples of the Dream  
And all the tribes of Vision.

And men besought them ; and from deep  
Confused underworlds of sleep  
They showed blind things that erst had been  
And are and yet shall follow.  
So did avenge that old Earth Queen  
Her child's wrong on Apollo.

Then swiftly flew that conquering one  
 To Zeus on high, and round the throne  
 Twining a small indignant hand,  
 Prayed him to send redeeming  
 To Pytho from that troublous band  
 Sprung from the darks of dreaming.

Zeus laughed to see the babe, I trow,  
 So swift to claim his golden rite ;  
 He laughed and bowed his head, in vow  
 To still those voices of the night.  
 And so from out the eyes of men  
 That dark dream-truth was lost again ;  
 And Phoebus, thronèd where the throng  
 Prays at the golden portal,  
 Again doth shed in sunlit song  
 Hope unto all things mortal.

---

*Enter a MESSENGER, running.*

MESSENGER.

Ho, watchers of the fane ! Ho, altar-guard,  
 Where is King Thoas gone ? Undo the barred  
 Portals, and call the King ! The King I seek.

LEADER.

What tidings—if unbidden I may speak ?

MESSENGER.

The strangers both are gone, and we beguiled,  
 By some dark plot of Agamemnon's child :

Fled from the land ! And on a barque of Greece  
Then bear the heaven-sent shape of Artemis.

LEADER.

Thy tale is past belief.—Go, swiftly on,  
And find the King. He is but newly gone.

MESSENGER.

Where went he ? He must know of what has passed !

LEADER.

I know not where he went. But follow fast  
And seek him. Thou wilt light on him ere long.

MESSENGER.

See there ! The treason of a woman's tongue !  
Ye all are in the plot, I warrant ye !

LEADER.

Thy words are mad ! What are the men to me ? . . .  
Go to the palace, go !

MESSENGER (*seeing the great knocker on the  
Temple door*).

I will not stir  
Till word be come by this good messenger  
If Thoas be within these gates or no.—

[*Thundering at the door.*



Ho, loose the portals ! Ye within ! What ho !  
Open, and tell our master one doth stand  
Without here, with strange evil in his hand.

*Enter THOAS from the Temple.*

THOAS.

Who dares before this portal consecrate  
Make uproar and lewd battering of the gate ?  
Thy noise hath broke the Altar's ancient peace.

MESSENGER.

Ye Gods ! They swore to me—and bade me cease  
My search—the King was gone. And all the  
while . . . !

THOAS.

These women ? How ? What sought they by such  
guile ?

MESSENGER.

Of them hereafter !—Give me first thine ear  
For greater things. The virgin minister  
That served our altar, she hath fled from this  
And stolen the dread Shape of Artemis,  
With those two Greeks. The cleansing was a lie.

THOAS.

She fled ?—What wild hope whispered her to fly ?

MESSENGER.

The hope to save Orestes. Wonder on !

THOAS.

Orestes—how ? Not Clytemnestra's son ?

MESSENGER.

And our pledged altar-offering. 'Tis the same.

THOAS.

O marvel beyond marvel ! By what name  
More rich in wonder can I name thee right ?

MESSENGER.

Give not thy mind to that. Let ear and sight  
Be mine awhile ; and when thou hast heard the whole  
Devise how best to trap them ere the goal.

THOAS.

Aye, tell thy tale. Our Tauric seas stretch far,  
Where no man may escape my wand of war.

MESSENGER.

Soon as we reached that headland of the sea,  
Whereby Orestes' barque lay secretly,  
We soldiers holding, by thine own commands,  
The chain that bound the strangers, in our hands,

There Agamemnon's daughter made a sign,  
 Bidding us wait far off, for some divine  
 And secret fire of cleansing she must make.  
 We could but do her will. We saw her take  
 The chain in her own hands and walk behind.  
 Indeed thy servants bore a troubled mind,  
 O King, but how do else? So time went by.  
 Meanwhile to make it seem she wrought some high  
 Magic, she cried aloud : then came the long  
 Drone of some strange and necromantic song,  
 As though she toiled to cleanse that blood ; and there  
 Sat we, that long time, waiting. Till a fear  
 O'ertook us, that the men might slip their chain  
 And strike the priestess down and plunge amain  
 For safety : yet the dread our eyes to fill  
 With sights unbidden held us, and we still  
 Sat silent. But at last all spoke as one,  
 Forbid or not forbid, to hasten on  
 And find them. On we went, and suddenly,  
 With oarage poised, like wings upon the sea,  
 An Argive ship we saw, her fifty men  
 All benched, and on the shore, with every chain  
 Cast off, our strangers, standing by the stern !  
 The prow was held by stay-poles : turn by turn  
 The anchor-cable rose ; some men had strung  
 Long ropes into a ladder, which they swung  
 Over the side for those two Greeks to climb.

The plot was open, and we lost no time  
 But flew to seize the cables and the maid,  
 And through the stern dragged out the steering-  
 blade,

To spoil her course, and shouted : " Ho, what way  
 Is this, to sail the seas and steal away

An holy image and its minister ?

What man art thou, and what man's son, to bear  
Our priestess from the land ?" And clear thereon  
He spoke : " Orestes, Agamemnon's son,  
And brother to this maid, whom here in peace  
I bear, my long lost sister, back to Greece."

We none the less clung fast to her, and strove  
To drag her to thy judgment-seat. Thereof  
Came trouble and bruised jaws. For neither they  
Nor we had weapons with us. But the way  
Hard-beaten fist and heel from those two men  
Rained upon ribs and flank—again, again . . .  
To touch was to fall gasping ! Aye, they laid  
Their mark on all of us, till back we fled  
With bleeding crowns, and some with blinded eyes,  
Up a rough bank of rock. There on the rise  
We found good stones and stood, and fought again.

But archers then came out, and sent a rain  
Of arrows from the poop, and drove us back.  
And just then—for a wave came, long and black,  
And swept them shoreward—lest the priestess' gown  
Should feel the sea, Orestes stooping down  
Caught her on his left shoulder : then one stride  
Out through the sea, the ladder at the side  
Was caught, and there amid the benches stood  
The maid of Argos and the carven wood  
Of heaven, the image of God's daughter high.

And up from the mid galley rose a cry :  
" For Greece ! For Greece, O children of the shores  
Of storm ! Give way, and let her feel your oars ;  
Churn the long waves to foam. The prize is won,  
The prize we followed, on and ever on,  
Friendless beyond the blue Symplêgades."

A roar of glad throats echoed down the breeze  
 And fifty oars struck, and away she flew.  
 And while the shelter lasted, she ran true  
 Full for the harbour-mouth ; but ere she well  
 Reached it, the weather caught her, and the swell  
 Was strong. Then sudden in her teeth a squall  
 Drove the sail bellying back. The men withal  
 Worked with set teeth, kicking against the stream.  
 But back, still back, striving as in a dream,  
 She drifted. Then the damsel rose and prayed :  
 "O Child of Leto, save thy chosen maid  
 From this dark land to Hellas, and forgive  
 My theft this day, and let these brave men live.  
 Dost thou not love thy brother, Holy One ?  
 What marvel if I also love mine own ?"

The sailors cried a paean to her prayers,  
 And set those brown and naked arms of theirs,  
 Half-mad with strain, quick swinging chime on chime  
 To the helmsman's shout. But vainly ; all the time  
 Nearer and nearer rockward they were pressed.  
 One of our men was wading to his breast,  
 Some others roping a great grappling-hook,  
 While I sped hot-foot to the town, to look  
 For thee, my Prince, and tell thee what doth pass.

Come with me, Lord. Bring manacles of brass  
 And bitter bonds. For now, unless the wave  
 Fall sudden calm, no mortal power can save  
 Orestes. There is One that rules the sea  
 Who grieved for Troy and hates her enemy :  
 Poseidon's self will give into thine hand  
 And ours this dog, this troubler of the land—  
 The priestess, too, who, recking not what blood  
 Ran red in Aulis, hath betrayed her god !

## LEADER.

Woe, woe ! To fall in these men's hands again,  
Mistress, and die, and see thy brother slain !

## THOAS.

Ho, all ye dwellers of my savage town  
Set saddle on your steeds, and gallop down  
To watch the heads, and gather what is cast  
Alive from this Greek wreck. We shall make fast  
By God's help, the blasphemers.—Send a corps  
Out in good boats a furlong from the shore ;  
So we shall either snare them on the seas  
Or ride them down by land, and at our ease  
Fling them down gulfs of rock, or pale them high  
On stakes in the sun, to feed our birds and die.

Women : you knew this plot. Each one of you  
Shall know, before the work I have to do  
Is done, what torment is.—Enough. A clear  
Task is afoot. I must not linger here.

*[While THOAS is moving off, his men shouting  
and running before and behind him, there  
comes a sudden blasting light and thunder-  
roll, and ATHENA is seen in the air con-  
fronting them.]*

## ATHENA.

Ho, whither now, so hot upon the prey,  
King Thoas ? It is I that bid thee stay,  
Athena, child of Zeus. Turn back this flood  
Of wrathful men, and get thee temperate blood.

Apollo's word and Fate's ordained path  
Have led Orestes here, to escape the wrath

Of Them that Hate. To Argos he must bring  
His sister's life, and guide that Holy Thing  
Which fell from heaven, in mine own land to  
dwell.  
So shall his pain have rest, and all be well.  
Thou hast heard my speech, O King. No death  
from thee  
May snare Orestes between rocks and sea :  
Poseidon for my love doth make the sore  
Waves gentle, and set free his labouring oar.

And thou, O far away—for, far or near  
A goddess speaketh and thy heart must hear—  
Go on thy ways, Orestes, bearing home  
The Image and thy sister. When ye come  
To god-built Athens, lo, a land there is  
Half hid on Attica's last boundaries,  
A little land, hard by Karystus' Rock,  
But sacred. It is called by Attic folk  
Halae. Build there a temple, and bestow  
Therein thine Image, that the world may know  
The tale of Tauris and of thee, cast out  
From pole to pole of Greece, a blood-hound rout  
Of ill thoughts driving thee. So through the  
whole  
Of time to Artemis the Tauropole  
Shall men make hymns at Halae. And withal  
Give them this law. At each high festival,  
A sword, in record of thy death undone,  
Shall touch a man's throat, and the red blood  
run—  
One drop, for old religion's sake. In this  
Shall live that old red rite of Artemis.

And thou, Iphigenia, by the stair  
Of Brauron in the rocks, the Key shalt bear  
Of Artemis. There shalt thou live and die,  
And there have burial. And a gift shall lie  
Above thy shrine, fair raiment undefiled  
Left upon earth by mothers dead with child.

Ye last, O exiled women, true of heart  
And faithful found, ye shall in peace depart,  
Each to her home : behold Athena's will.

Orestes, long ago on Ares' Hill  
I saved thee, when the votes of Death and Life  
Lay equal : and henceforth, when men at strife  
So stand, mid equal votes of Life and Death,  
My law shall hold that Mercy conquereth.  
Begone. Lead forth thy sister from this shore  
In peace ; and thou, Thoas, be wroth no more.

#### THOAS.

Most high Athena, he who bows not low  
His head to God's word spoken, I scarce know  
How such an one doth live. Orestes hath  
Fled with mine Image hence. . . . I bear no wrath.  
Nor yet against his sister. There is naught,  
Methinks, of honour in a battle fought  
'Gainst gods. The strength is theirs. Let those two  
fare  
Forth to thy land and plant mine Image there.  
I wish them well.

These bondwomen no less  
I will send free to Greece and happiness,



And stay my galleys' oars, and bid this brand  
Be sheathed again, Goddess, at thy command.

ATHENA.

'Tis well, O King. For that which needs must be  
Holdeth the high gods as it holdeth thee.

Winds of the north, O winds that laugh and run,  
Bear now to Athens Agamemnon's son :  
Myself am with you, o'er long leagues of foam  
Guiding my sister's hallowed Image home.

*[She floats away.]*

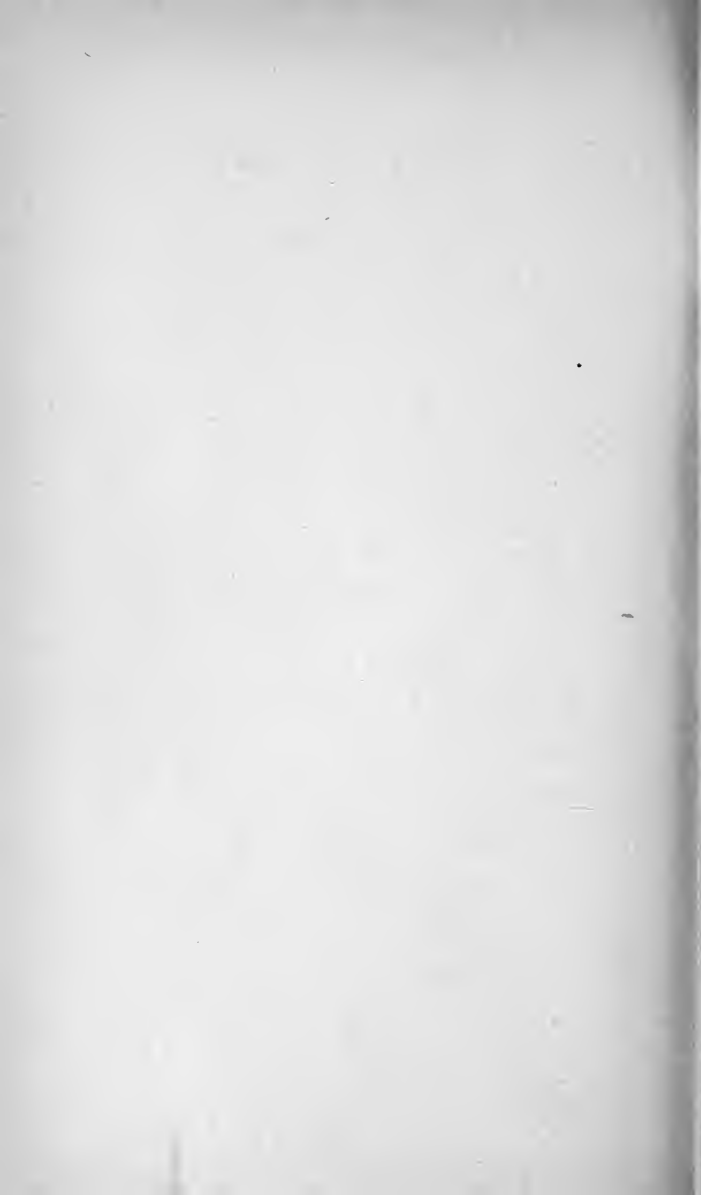
CHORUS.

*Some Women.*

Go forth in bliss, O ye whose lot  
God shieldeth, that ye perish not !

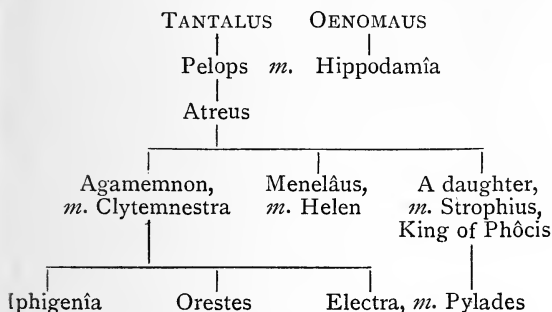
*Others.*

O great in our dull world of clay,  
And great in heaven's undying gleam,  
Pallas, thy bidding we obey :  
And bless thee, for mine ears have heard  
The joy and wonder of a word  
Beyond my dream, beyond my dream.



# NOTES TO IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

## GENEALOGY OF THE CHIEF PERSONS MENTIONED IN THE PLAY



(The names "Iphigeniâ," "Hippodamîa" have the last syllable long, as in "Obadiah"; similarly, "Menelaus" rhymes with "slay us." But Oenomaus and Strophius have the penultimate short.)

P. 3, l. 1.]—Oenomaüs, King of Elis, offered his daughter and his kingdom to any man who should beat him in a chariot race; those who failed he slew. Pelops challenged him and won the race through a trick of his servant, Myrtilus, who treacherously took the linchpins out of Oenomaüs's chariot. Oenomaüs was thrown out and killed; Pelops took the kingdom, but in remorse or indignation threw Myrtilus

into the sea (l. 192, p. 11). In some stories Oenomaüs killed the suitors by spearing them from behind when they passed him.—Pelops was the son of Tantalus, renowned for his pride and its punishment.

P. 3, l. 8, For Helen's sake.]—*i.e.* in order to win Helen back from the Trojans.

P. 4, l. 23, Whatever birth most fair.]—Artemis Kalliste ("Most Fair") was apparently so called because, after a competition for beauty, that which won the prize (τὸ καλλιστεῖον) was selected and given to her. This rite is made by the story to lead to a sacrifice of the fairest maiden, and may very possibly have sometimes done so.

P. 4, l. 42.]—She tells her dream to the sky to get it off her mind, much as the Nurse does in the *Medea* (p. 5, l. 57).

P. 5, l. 50, One . . . pillar.]—It is worth remembering that a pillar was among the earliest objects of worship in Crete and elsewhere. Cf. "the pillared sanctities" (l. 128, p. 9) and the "blood on the pillars" (l. 405, p. 20).

P. 8, l. 113, A hollow one might creep through.]—The metopes, or gaps between the beams. The Temple was therefore of a primitive Dorian type.

P. 8, ll. 124–125.]—The land of Tauris is conceived as being beyond the Symplêgades, or, as here, as being the country of the Symplêgades.

As these semi-mythical names settled down in history, Tauris became the Crimea, the Symplêgades, or "Clashing Rocks," or "Dark-Blue Rocks," became two rocks at the upper end of the Bosphorus, and the Friendless or Strangerless Sea became the Euxine. The word *Axeinos*, "Friendless," has often

been altered in the MSS. of this play to *Euxeinos*, "Hospitable," which was the ordinary prose name of the Black Sea in historical times.

P. 9, l. 133, The horses and the towers.]—The steppes of the Taurians would have no gardens or city walls, but it is curious that Hellas should seem specially a land of horses by comparison. Cf. p. 86, l. 1423, where Thoas has horses.

P. 10, l. 168, The golden goblet, &c.]—She evidently takes jars of libation from the Attendants and pours them during the next few lines into some *Eschara*, or Altar for the Dead. Most of the rite would probably be performed kneeling.

P. 11, ll. 192 ff., The dark and wheeling coursers.]—*i.e.* those of Pelops. The cry of one betrayed: Myrtilus, when he was thrown into the sea. (See on l. 1.) For the Golden Lamb and the Sun turning in Heaven, see my translation of *Electra*, p. 47, ll. 699 and note.

P. 12, l. 217, The Nereid's Son.]—Achilles, son of Peleus and the Nereid Thetis.

P. 13, l. 238, The Herdsman's entrance.]—Observe how Iphigenia is first merely disturbed in her obsequies: then comes the sickening news that there are strangers to sacrifice: then lastly, her worst fear is realised; the men are Greeks. This explains her exasperated tone in ll. 254, "The sea! What is the sea . . ." and "Go back!"—The Herdsman is merely jubilant and obtuse.

P. 15, l. 263.]—The murex or purple-fish could only be collected in very late autumn or early spring; consequently the fishers made encampments for the winter and returned to Tyre and Sidon, or wherever

else they came from, after the spring fishing. See Bérard, *Phéniciens et Odyssée*, i. 415.

P. 15, l. 270, Son of the White Sea Spirit, &c.]—The man is, of course, made to use the names of Greek not of Taurian gods. He thinks first of Palaemon, a sea-god, son of Leucothea ("White-Goddess"), then of the Dioskori, Castor and Polydeuces; then vaguely of some spirits beloved of Nereus, the Ancient of the Sea.

P. 17, l. 328 f., Of all those shots not one struck home.]—The object of this statement must be to explain why the two heroes do not make their appearance bruised and dishevelled as the Second Messenger does after his fight with the Greeks. Of course there is no great harm in making the Taurians bad shots as well as cowards, and possibly there is some value in the suggestion of a supernatural protection which is only saving its object for a crueller death. But very likely the two lines are interpolations.

Pp. 17, 18, ll. 342 ff.]—A wonderful speech, illustrating the gradual breaking-up of the ice in Iphigenia's nature.—The Herdsman's story has, of course, been horrible to her; all the more so because he expects her to enjoy it and recalls wild words she has uttered in the past, when brooding on her wrongs. She controls her feelings absolutely till the man is gone. Then she feels like one turned to stone, pitiless; then, if only it were Helen or Menelaus that she had to kill! Then vivid thoughts of the misery and horror of Aulis and the poor foolish hopes and tremors in which she had come there; then the thought that Orestes, the one man whom she could love without resentment, is dead. Then a rage of indignation

against the bloody rites and the infamy of the thing she has to do. She goes into the Temple broken in nerve and almost ready for rebellion.

P. 19, l. 385 ff.]—Lêtô, beloved of Zeus, was the mother of Artemis and Apollo, who were born in the holy island of Dêlos.—One legend, already rejected by Pindar, said that the crime of Tantalus was that he had given his child Pelops to the gods to eat.

P. 19, l. 392, Dark of the sea.]—The Dark-Blue of the Symplêgades is meant. Sometimes it is only the *Argo* that has ever passed through them; here it is only Io, daughter of Inachus, loved by Zeus and hunted by the gadfly, who fled outcast through the East. Her story is told in Aeschylus' *Prometheus* and in a magnificent chorus of his *Suppliant Women*. (See *Rise of the Greek Epic*, pp. 247 ff.)

The present lyric begins by wondering how and why the strangers have come: then come thoughts of the voyage and places they must have passed; the coast, where Phineus was haunted by the Harpies, the enchanted sea beyond the Symplêgades, and the mysterious Isle of Leuce ("White") where Achilles lives after death.—Then comes a thought of Iphigeniâ's longing for revenge on Helen: but revenge is no use. It is home they crave, or, if that is impossible, then sleep and dreams of home.

P. 21, l. 431, The steering oar abaft.]—The steering was done by an oar, or sometimes two oars, projecting into the sea from a hole in the stern. Cf. l. 1356, p. 83, "And through the stern dragged out the steering-blade." If this oar was left free, it would ripple and beat against the side.

P. 23, l. 472. What mother then was yours, &c.]—

Not very like a woman "turned to stone" or "without a tear." She had miscalculated her own feelings.—Observe how Orestes sternly rejects her sentimental sympathy. He needs all his strength.

P. 25, l. 512, A kind of banishment.]—He was driven by his Furies, not legally banished.

Pp. 26, 27, ll. 515 and 529, "Oh how sweet to see thee here!" and "Oh, give me this hour full. Thou wilt soon die."—Iphigenia is more than tactless. She is so starving for home or anything that brings her into touch with home, that neither this Stranger's death nor anything else matters to her in comparison. A fine dramatic stroke.

The people of whom she asks are, first, her enemies—Helen; Calchas, the prophet, who had commanded her sacrifice; Odysseus, who had devised the plot by which she was brought to Aulis (ll. 16, 24); then Achilles, who had been the hero of her dreams; then, with fear and hesitancy, those for whom she cares most.—Observe, at l. 553, how, on hearing of her father's murder, her first thought is pity for her mother. Her father is already in her mind "he that slew." But in every line of this dialogue there is fine drama and psychology.

P. 28, l. 538, "Small help his bridal brought him; he is dead."—It has been thought curious that the mention of Achilles should immediately suggest to Orestes the bridal at Aulis, though of course it does so to Iphigenia. But after all it was Orestes' sister that Achilles was to marry at Aulis; and secondly, a large part of Orestes' troubles came from the carrying off of his betrothed, Hermione, by Achilles' bastard son, Pyrrhus. If the marriage



at Aulis had taken place and Achilles left a true-born son, that would all have been different.

P. 31, l. 569, Light dreams farewell! Ye too were lies.]—This does seem a wrong conclusion. The dreams only suggested that Orestes had died the day before, long after this man had left Argos. But perhaps it is not unnatural.

P. 32, ll. 576 f., We too have kinsmen dear.]—A most characteristic Euripidean saying. It also leads up to the personal interest in the Chorus which we feel after l. 1075, p. 63, when they are taken into the conspiracy and then abandoned.

P. 32, l. 578, Listen; for I am fallen upon a thought.]—It must not be supposed that this use of the tablet is an obvious or easy thing. It is a daring project that crosses her mind, as one possible way of avoiding the death of this Stranger. Her hesitation at l. 742—where a pause is indicated in the Greek—shows that she is only trusting to her special influence over the King to get him to relax the law. Presumably merchants sometimes were admitted to the Tauri; for instance, those who brought the Chorus. The safe way to use the tablet would have been to make sure of the friendship of one of these. But such questions lie outside the play.

P. 34, l. 618, This altar's spell is over me.]—I translate the MS. reading,  $\tau\eta\sigma\delta\epsilon$ . In my text I accepted the usual emendation  $\tau\eta\nu\delta\epsilon$ . But  $\pi\rho\sigma\tau\rho\omicron\pi\eta$  means "spell" or "infection." See *Rise of the Greek Epic*, p. 86.

P. 34, l. 627, My sister's hand.]—i.e. Electra's.

Pp. 35-39, ll. 645-724.]—Observe that all through this scene it is Pylades who is broken

and Orestes strong. Contrast their first entrance, pp. 6-8.

P. 45, l. 804, Argos is bright with him.]—Literally, "is full of him." I am not sure that I understand the expression, but I think she feels Orestes as a magnificent presence filling all his home.

P. 46, ll. 809 ff.]—The "signs" are clear enough. He remembers that there was an embroidery of the Golden Lamb story worked by Iphigenia; that when she started for Aulis she had cut off her hair for her mother and her mother had given her some Inachus water to use in the sacred washing before her marriage; also there was an old spear belonging to Pelops in Iphigenia's room.—Apparently Pelops carried a spear in the chariot race, just as Oenomaüs did.

Pp. 47-50, ll. 827-900.]—In this scene Iphigenia simply abandons herself to one emotion after another, while Orestes, amid all his joy, keeps his head and thinks about the danger that still surrounds them. When he reminds her that they are "not yet fortunate," she thinks only of Aulis and her old wrong. At last Orestes gets in the word, "Suppose you had murdered me to-day," and she is recalled by a rush of horror at her own conduct: she has nearly killed him, and he is still in imminent danger. She tries passionately and despairingly to think of ways of escape, but it needs the intervention of Pylades (which she rather resents) to bring her into a mood for sober thinking.

P. 51, l. 915, A wife and happy.]—The last we heard of Electra was that she lived "unmated and alone" (l. 562, p. 31). But that was said when Pylades was regarded as practically a dead man.

## NOTES

Electra was apparently betrothed to Pylades, but was not actually his wife.—There is no mention of the Peasant husband of the *Electra*.

P. 52, l. 818.]—Anaxibia (?), sister of Agamemnon, was wife to Strophios. See genealogical table.

P. 53, ll. 930 ff., 'That frenzy on the shore!']—It is only now that Iphigenia fully realises her brother's madness. His narrative immediately following makes her feel it the more, and it is evidently in her mind while she speaks ll. 989 ff.

P. 54 f., l. 940 ff., Orestes' Trial at Athens.]—According to one legend Orestes was finally purified of his guilt by a trial at the Areopagus, in which Apollo championed him, and Athena, as President, gave a casting vote for mercy. (This is the story of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*.) By another, he was healed when he had brought this Image of Artemis to Attica. Euripides combines the two.—It must often have happened in a blood-feud that some of the kindred of the slain man would accept the result of a trial and obey the law, while some cared for no law but clung to their vengeance. Euripides makes the Furies do the same. Some accept the judgment and stay as "Eumenides" in Athens; others know no law nor mercy.

P. 55, ll. 949–960, Mine evil days are made a rite among them.]—At the Feast of the Anthesteria, each family summoned its ghosts from the grave and after the feast sent them back again. While they were about, it was very important that each man should keep his ghosts to himself: there must be no infection of strange or baleful ghosts. Hence a rite in which each man ate and drank his own portion,

holding no communication with his neighbour. The story then went that this was done in commemoration of Orestes' visit to Athens with the stain of blood upon him. (See Miss Harrison's *Prolegomena*, chap. ii.) There was a similar feast in Aegina.

P. 56, ll. 990-1006.]—Iphigenia's speech. We must realise that Iphigenia has been suddenly confronted by a new and complicated difficulty. She was prepared to make some plot to save her brother's life. She now realises that he is on the verge of madness; that he is determined to commit an act of what will be considered desperate sacrilege by stealing the image of Artemis; and that he expects her to help him to get the image to his ship.—She might hope to send him away safe and be forgiven by the King: if she helps him to steal the image, she cannot possibly be forgiven. Again, she might very possibly fly with him secretly, if she went alone; but to steal the statue and fly seems impossible.

Confronted with this problem, she deliberately abandons both her thoughts of vengeance and her hope of escape, and agrees to give her life for Orestes.

P. 59, l. 1029, I think I dimly see.]—Compare *Electra*, translation, p. 42, where Electra suddenly solves the difficulty of slaying Clytemnestra.

P. 63, ll. 1075 ff., Be of good heart, sweet Mistress.]—The women of the Chorus are indeed "true of heart and faithful found," as Athena says later. And one feels that Iphigenia, after her first gush of gratitude, does not think of them much. She will save her brother, and they will be left with very little hope of ever seeing Greece, if indeed they are not fatally compromised by their share in the

plot.—One can hardly blame Iphigenia; but it is like her.

P. 64, l. 1089, Bird of the sea rocks.]—A wonderful lyric, as spoken by these exiles waiting on the shore.—In their craving for home the island of Delos becomes the symbol for all that is Greek. Delos, the birth-place of Apollo and of a kinder Artemis than that which they now serve, was the meeting-place of all the Ionians. The palm-tree, the laurel, the olive, and the Orbed Lake of Delos were all celebrated in ritual poetry. The singing Swan is not a myth; it is a migratory swan, with a bell-like cry, which comes in the winter down from South Russia to Greece.

Isle of Pain and Love.]—Literally, “Beloved birth-pang of Leto.” When Leto was about to give birth to her twin children and no land would receive her, the little rock of Delos pitied her and gave her a resting-place.

P. 64, ll. 1106 ff., Ah, the old tears.]—The singer’s mind goes back to her old grief, when her city was taken and she sold as a slave from market to market till she reached Thoas. Then comes the thought of Iphigenia’s happy voyage to Greece and freedom; then a dream-like longing to fly home, to watch the dances where once she danced for the prize of beauty.

P. 67, l. 1156, Iphigenia enters, carrying the Image.]—It would probably be a sort of Palladion—a rough figure with a shield (originally typifying the moon?), not very large. She would probably hold it in a robe of some sort, that her bare hand might not touch a thing so holy. At sight of Thoas she would probably cover it up altogether. It is not quite clear when she puts the image down.

P. 67, l. 1161, I unsay that word.]—It was a bad omen for Thoas to say at so critical a moment that a rule was broken. The priestess declares the word unsaid—just the opposite of “accepting” an omen.—Dr. Verrall, however, suggests to me that the line means, “I ask Hestia (the spirit of Holiness) to take in charge what I am going to say”; *i.e.* all the falsehoods into which she is about to plunge.

This scene of the fooling of Thoas is full of wit and double meanings. The end of it is rather like the famous scene in *Forget-me-not*, where the Corsican avenger is induced to turn his back in order to let a lady pass out of the room without being seen and compromised, the lady in question being really the person whom he has sworn to kill.

P. 72, ll. 1203 ff.]—The change of metre denotes increasing tension of excitement.

Each individual invention of Iphigenia seems clearly to have its purpose. She wants to combine a great appearance of precaution against the escape of the strangers—hence the soldiers, the bonds, &c.—with the greatest possible reality of precaution against any one preventing their escape: hence she takes the soldiers without an officer, the townsfolk are forbidden to follow or even to look, and the King is left at the Temple. The exact motive of all the veiling I do not see; perhaps it adds to the effect to represent Thoas as deliberately hiding his eyes while he is deceived. But in any case her precautions all seem sound according to ancient theology.

P. 77, ll. 1235, 1282, Oh, fair the fruits of Leto blow, &c.]—A curious and rather difficult little ritual hymn explaining how Apollo came from Delos to

## NOTES

Delphi. It acts more as an interlude than anything else, to fill the time until we learn the issue of the attempt at escape.

All Delphi originally belonged to Mother Earth. The oracles were given by her daughter Themis, and the place guarded by an ancient earth-born Dragon. Apollo came, slew the Dragon, and turned Themis away. Earth took revenge upon him in a curious manner: she invented Dreams, which told the future freely, though, it would seem, confusedly, and, so to speak, spoiled the trade of Delphi until Apollo appealed to Zeus for protection.—The story is not very creditable to the gods, and is expressly denied by Aeschylus on that ground. According to him there was never any strife; Earth, Themis, Phoebê peacefully succeeded one another at Delphi, and Phoebê gave it as a birth-gift to Phoebus or Apollo.

I think the story is probably a case of the infant Sun slaying the Serpent of darkness. The ancient identification of Phoebus Apollo with the sun and Artemis-Hecate with the moon seems to me to withstand all modern criticisms, though of course there are many other elements combined with the Sun and Moon elements.

P. 79, l. 1284, Messenger.]—This excited rush upon the stage of a man clamouring for the King is very clever as a next step in the story. One sees at once the sort of thing that has happened, and wants to know what exactly.

P. 80, l. 1302, "This good messenger."—There is nothing to tell us what the good messenger is. Probably a large sacred knocker, such as were often on temple doors. (They served for suppliants to

catch hold of as well as for summoning the people inside.) But it may be a gong or a horn hanging by the door, or the like.

P. 82, l. 1325, Aye, tell thy tale.]—It is perhaps a little awkward that Thoas should ask for the whole story before taking any steps to pursue Iphigenia. But partly he is so amazed that he wants to hear all he can before moving; partly, he is represented as being really sure of his prey, as king of all the Taurian seas.

P. 83, l. 1350, The prow was held by stay-poles.]—The ship was afloat, having been just dragged off the shore, bow forwards. The men were raising the anchor, and holding the prow steady by long punt-poles. The ladder seems to have been a rope-ladder; but the Greek is difficult, and I do not know of any mention of a rope-ladder elsewhere in Greek literature.

P. 84, l. 1384, The Maid of Argos and the carven wood of Heaven.]—Observe how closely Iphigenia and the image are united. She appears with it in her arms; she must fly together with it, or die; she and the image enter the ship together. There is religion behind this. Perhaps there was some old statue of the goddess carrying her own image, as Athena sometimes carries a Palladion; when Iphigenia became the priestess and Artemis the goddess, this was interpreted as the priestess carrying the goddess' image.

P. 85, l. 1415, There is One who rules the sea.]—Poseidon, the sea god, was traditionally a friend of Troy. See the first scene of *The Trojan Women*.

P. 86, l. 1435, ATHENA.]—Modern readers com-



plain a good deal of this appearance of the God from the Machine. Some day I hope to discuss the *Deus ex Machina* at length, but in the meantime I would point out the following facts: 1. A theophany or appearance of a god seems to have been in the essence of the original conception of Greek Drama; a study of the fragments of Aeschylus will illustrate this. What Euripides did, apparently, was to invent, or use when invented, an improved kind of stage machinery for introducing the god in the air. 2. The theophany seems to have been effective with the Greek audience, and I believe it would usually be so with any audience that was not highly sophisticated and accustomed to associate such appearances with pantomime fairies. 3. In nearly all cases the god who appears not only speaks lines of great beauty and serenity, but also comes with counsel and comfort which have something of heaven about them. The Dioscori of the *Electra* are most typical, healing the agony of revenge by sheer forgiveness; the beautiful Artemis of the *Hippolytus* is different, but divine also. But every case needs its special treatment.

P. 87, l. 1457, Artemis the Tauropole.]—On the rite of Artemis Tauropolos at Halae, see Preface, p. vi. There is a play on words in "Tauropole"; it is interesting to see that Euripides has prepared for it as early as Orestes' first speech, ll. 84 f., though I did not think it worth representing in English there.

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ELECTRA

## CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

CLYTEMNESTRA, *Queen of Argos and Mycenae; widow of Agamemnon.*

ELECTRA, *daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.*

ORESTES, *son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, now in banishment.*

A PEASANT, *husband of Electra.*

AN OLD MAN, *formerly servant to Agamemnon.*

PYLADES, *son of Strophios, King of Phocis; friend to Orestes.*

AEGISTHUS, *usurping King of Argos and Mycenae, now husband of Clytemnestra.*

The Heroes CASTOR and POLYDEUCES.

CHORUS of Argive Women, with their LEADER.

FOLLOWERS of ORESTES; HANDMAIDS of CLYTEMNESTRA.

*The Scene is laid in the mountains of Argos. The play was first produced between the years 414 and 412 B.C.*

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

THE *Electra* of Euripides has the distinction of being, perhaps, the best abused, and, one might add, not the best understood, of ancient tragedies. "A singular monument of poetical, or rather unpoetical perversity;" "the very worst of all his pieces;" are, for instance, the phrases applied to it by Schlegel. Considering that he judged it by the standards of conventional classicism, he could scarcely have arrived at any different conclusion. For it is essentially, and perhaps consciously, a protest against those standards. So, indeed, is the tragedy of *The Trojan Women*; but on very different lines. The *Electra* has none of the imaginative splendour, the vastness, the intense poetry, of that wonderful work. It is a close-knit, powerful, well-constructed play, as realistic as the tragic conventions will allow, intellectual and rebellious. Its psychology reminds one of Browning, or even of Ibsen.

To a fifth-century Greek all history came in the form of legend; and no less than three extant tragedies, Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers* (456 B.C.), Euripides' *Electra* (413 B.C.), and Sophocles' *Electra* (date unknown: but perhaps the latest of the three) are based on the particular piece of legend or history now before us. It narrates how the son and daughter

<sup>1</sup> Most of this introduction is reprinted, by the kind permission of the Editors, from an article in the *Independent Review*, vol. i. No. 4.

of the murdered king, Agamemnon, slew, in due course of revenge, and by Apollo's express command, their guilty mother and her paramour.

Homer had long since told the story, as he tells so many, simply and grandly, without moral questioning and without intensity. The atmosphere is heroic. It is all a blood-feud between chieftains, in which Orestes, after seven years, succeeds in slaying his foe Aegisthus, who had killed his father. He probably killed his mother also ; but we are not directly told so. His sister may have helped him, and he may possibly have gone mad afterwards ; but these painful issues are kept determinedly in the shade.

Somewhat surprisingly, Sophocles, although by his time Electra and Clytemnestra had become leading figures in the story and the mother-murder its essential climax, preserves a very similar atmosphere. His tragedy is enthusiastically praised by Schlegel for "the celestial purity, the fresh breath of life and youth, that is diffused over so dreadful a subject." "Everything dark and ominous is avoided. Orestes enjoys the fulness of health and strength. He is beset neither with doubts nor stings of conscience." Especially laudable is the "austerity" with which Aegisthus is driven into the house to receive, according to Schlegel, a specially ignominious death !

This combination of matricide and good spirits, however satisfactory to the determined classicist, will probably strike most intelligent readers as a little curious, and even, if one may use the word at all in connection with so powerful a play, undramatic. It

becomes intelligible as soon as we observe that Sophocles was deliberately seeking what he regarded as an archaic or "Homeric" style (cf. Jebb, *Introd.* p. xli.) ; and this archaism, in its turn, seems to me best explained as a conscious reaction against Euripides' searching and unconventional treatment of the same subject (cf. Wilamowitz in *Hermes*, xviii. pp. 214 ff.). In the result Sophocles is not only more "classical" than Euripides ; he is more primitive by far than Aeschylus.

For Aeschylus, though steeped in the glory of the world of legend, would not lightly accept its judgment upon religious and moral questions, and above all would not, in that region, play at make-believe. He would not elude the horror of this story by simply not mentioning it, like Homer, or by pretending that an evil act was a good one, like Sophocles. He faces the horror ; realises it ; and tries to surmount it on the sweep of a great wave of religious emotion. The mother-murder, even if done by a god's command, is a sin ; a sin to be expiated by unfathomable suffering. Yet, since the god cannot have commanded evil, it is a duty also. It is a sin that *must* be committed.

Euripides, here as often, represents intellectually the thought of Aeschylus carried a step further. He faced the problem just as Aeschylus did, and as Sophocles did not. But the solution offered by Aeschylus did not satisfy him. It cannot, in its actual details, satisfy any one. To him the mother-murder—like most acts of revenge, but more than most—was a sin and a horror. Therefore it should

not have been committed ; and the god who enjoined it *did* command evil, as he had done in a hundred other cases ! He is no god of light ; he is only a demon of old superstition, acting, among other influences, upon a sore-beset man, and driving him towards a miscalled duty, the horror of which, when done, will unseat his reason.

But another problem interests Euripides even more than this. What kind of man was it—above all, what kind of woman can it have been, who would do this deed of mother-murder, not in sudden fury but deliberately, as an act of “justice,” after many years ? A “sympathetic” hero and heroine are out of the question ; and Euripides does not deal in stage villains. He seeks real people. And few attentive readers of this play can doubt that he has found them.

The son is an exile, bred in the desperate hopes and wild schemes of exile ; he is a prince without a kingdom, always dreaming of his wrongs and his restoration ; and driven by the old savage doctrine, which an oracle has confirmed, of the duty and manliness of revenge. He is, as was shown by his later history, a man subject to overpowering impulses and to fits of will-less brooding. Lastly, he is very young, and is swept away by his sister’s intenser nature.

That sister is the central figure of the tragedy. A woman shattered in childhood by the shock of an experience too terrible for a girl to bear ; a poisoned and a haunted woman, eating her heart in ceaseless broodings of hate and love, alike unsatisfied—hate



against her mother and stepfather, love for her dead father and her brother in exile ; a woman who has known luxury and state, and cares much for them ; who is intolerant of poverty, and who feels her youth passing away. And meantime there is her name, on which all legend, if I am not mistaken, insists ; she is *A-lektra*, "the Unmated."

There is, perhaps, no woman's character in the range of Greek tragedy so profoundly studied. Not Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, not Phaedra nor Medea. One's thoughts can only wander towards two great heroines of "lost" plays, Althaea in the *Meleager*, and Stheneboea in the *Bellerophon*.

G. M.



## ELECTRA

*The scene represents a hut on a desolate mountain side ; the river Inachus is visible in the distance. The time is the dusk of early dawn, before sunrise. The PEASANT is discovered in front of the hut.*

### PEASANT.

Old gleam on the face of the world, I give thee  
hail,

River of Argos land, where sail on sail  
The long ships met, a thousand, near and far,  
When Agamemnon walked the seas in war ;  
Who smote King Priam in the dust, and burned  
The storied streets of Ilion, and returned  
Above all conquerors, heaping tower and fane  
Of Argos high with spoils of Eastern slain.

So in far lands he prospered ; and at home  
His own wife trapped and slew him. 'Twas the doom  
Aegisthus wrought, son of his father's foe.

Gone is that King, and the old spear laid low  
That Tantalus wielded when the world was young.  
Aegisthus hath his queen, and reigns among  
His people. And the children here alone,  
Orestes and Electra, buds unblown

Of man and womanhood, when forth to Troy  
He shook his sail and left them—lo, the boy  
Orestes, ere Aegisthus' hand could fall,  
Was stolen from Argos—borne by one old thrall,  
Who served his father's boyhood, over seas  
Far off, and laid upon King Strophios' knees  
In Phocis, for the old king's sake. But here  
The maid Electra waited, year by year,  
Alone, till the warm days of womanhood  
Drew nigh and suitors came of gentle blood  
In Hellas. Then Aegisthus was in fear  
Lest she be wed in some great house, and bear  
A son to avenge her father. Close he wrought  
Her prison in his house, and gave her not  
To any wooer. Then, since even this  
Was full of peril, and the secret kiss  
Of some bold prince might find her yet, and rend  
Her prison walls, Aegisthus at the end  
Would slay her. Then her mother, she so wild  
Aforetime, pled with him and saved her child.  
Her heart had still an answer for her lord  
Murdered, but if the child's blood spoke, what word  
Could meet the hate thereof? After that day  
Aegisthus thus decreed : whoso should slay  
The old king's wandering son, should win rich  
meed

Of gold ; and for Electra, she must wed  
With me, not base of blood—in that I stand  
True Mycenaean—but in gold and land  
Most poor, which maketh highest birth as naught.  
So from a powerless husband shall be wrought  
A powerless peril. Had some man of might  
Possessed her, he had called perchance to light

Her father's blood, and unknown vengeance  
Risen on Aegisthus yet.

Aye, mine she is :  
But never yet these arms—the Cyprian knows  
My truth !—have clasped her body, and she goes  
A virgin still. Myself would hold it shame  
To abase this daughter of a royal name.  
I am too lowly to love violence. Yea,  
Orestes too doth move me, far away,  
Mine unknown brother ! Will he ever now  
Come back and see his sister bowed so low ?

Doth any deem me fool, to hold a fair  
Maid in my room and seek no joy, but spare  
Her maidenhood ? If any such there be,  
Let him but look within. The fool is he  
In gentle things, weighing the more and less  
Of love by his own heart's untenderness.

*[As he ceases ELECTRA comes out of the hut. She is in mourning garb, and carries a large pitcher on her head. She speaks without observing the PEASANT's presence.]*

## ELECTRA.

Dark shepherdess of many a golden star,  
Dost see me, Mother Night ? And how this jar  
Hath worn my earth-bowed head, as forth and fro  
For water to the hillward springs I go ?  
Not for mere stress of need, but purpose set,  
That never day nor night God may forget  
Aegisthus' sin : aye, and perchance a cry  
Cast forth to the waste shining of the sky

May find my father's ear. . . . The woman bred  
 Of Tyndareus, my mother—on her head  
 Be curses!—from my house hath outcast me;  
 She hath borne children to our enemy;  
 She hath made me naught, she hath made Orestes  
 naught. . . .

[*As the bitterness of her tone increases, the*  
 PEASANT comes forward.]

PEASANT.

What wouldst thou now, my sad one, ever fraught  
 With toil to lighten my toil? And so soft  
 Thy nurture was! Have I not chid thee oft,  
 And thou wilt cease not, serving without end?

ELECTRA (*turning to him with impulsive affection*).

O friend, my friend, as God might be my friend,  
 Thou only hast not trampled on my tears.  
 Life scarce can be so hard, 'mid many fears  
 And many shames, when mortal heart can find  
 Somewhere one healing touch, as my sick mind  
 Finds thee. . . . And should I wait thy word, to  
 endure

A little for thine easing, yea, or pour  
 My strength out in thy toiling fellowship?  
 Thou hast enough with fields and kine to keep;  
 'Tis mine to make all bright within the door.  
 'Tis joy to him that toils, when toil is o'er,  
 To find home waiting, full of happy things.

## PEASANT.

If so it please thee, go thy way. The springs  
Are not far off. And I before the morn  
Must drive my team afield, and sow the corn  
In the hollows.—Not a thousand prayers can gain  
A man's bare bread, save an he work amain.

[ELECTRA and the PEASANT depart on their several  
ways. After a few moments there enter  
stealthily two armed men, ORESTES and  
PYLADES.]

## ORESTES.

Thou art the first that I have known in deed  
True and my friend, and shelterer of my need.  
Thou only, Pylades, of all that knew,  
Hast held Orestes of some worth, all through  
These years of helplessness, wherein I lie  
Downtrodden by the murderer—yea, and by  
The murderess, my mother! . . . I am come,  
Fresh from the cleansing of Apollo, home  
To Argos—and my coming no man yet  
Knoweth—to pay the bloody twain their debt  
Of blood. This very night I crept alone  
To my dead father's grave, and poured thereon  
My heart's first tears and tresses of my head  
New-shorn, and o'er the barrow of the dead  
Slew a black lamb, unknown of them that reign  
In this unhappy land. . . . I am not fain  
To pass the city gates, but hold me here  
Hard on the borders. So my road is clear

To fly if men look close and watch my way ;  
 If not, to seek my sister. For men say  
 She dwelleth in these hills, no more a maid  
 But wedded. I must find her house, for aid  
 To guide our work, and learn what hath betid  
 Of late in Argos.—Ha, the radiant lid  
 Of Dawn's eye lifteth ! Come, friend ; leave we now  
 This trodden path. Some worker of the plough,  
 Or serving damsel at her early task  
 Will presently come by, whom we may ask  
 If here my sister dwells. But soft ! Even now  
 I see some bondmaid there, her death-shorn brow  
 Bending beneath its freight of well-water.  
 Lie close until she pass ; then question her.  
 A slave might help us well, or speak some sign  
 Of import to this work of mine and thine.

[*The two men retire into ambush.* ELECTRA  
*enters, returning from the well.*

ELECTRA.

Onward, O labouring tread,  
 As on move the years ;  
 Onward amid thy tears,  
 O happier dead !

Let me remember. I am she, [Strophe 1.  
 Agamemnon's child, and the mother of me  
 Clytemnestra, the evil Queen,  
 Helen's sister. And folk, I ween,  
 That pass in the streets call yet my name  
 Electra. . . . God protect my shame !



For toil, toil is a weary thing,  
And life is heavy about my head ;  
And thou' far off, O Father and King,  
In the lost lands of the dead.

A bloody twain made these things be ;  
One was thy bitterest enemy,  
And one the wife that lay by thee.

Brother, brother, on some far shore [Antistrophe 1.  
Hast thou a city, is there a door  
That knows thy footfall, Wandering One ?  
Who left me, left me, when all our pain  
Was bitter about us, a father slain,  
And a girl that wept in her room alone.

Thou couldst break me this bondage sore,  
Only thou, who art far away,  
Loose our father, and wake once more. . . .

Zeus, Zeus, dost hear me pray ? . . .

The sleeping blood and the shame and the doom !  
O feet that rest not, over the foam  
Of distant seas, come home, come home !

What boots this cruse that I carry ? [Strophe 2.  
O, set free my brow !

For the gathered tears that tarry

Through the day and the dark till now,  
Now in the dawn are free,

Father, and flow beneath  
The floor of the world, to be

As a song in the house of Death :  
From the rising up of the day  
They guide my heart alway,  
The silent tears unshed,  
And my body mourns for the dead ;

My cheeks bleed silently,  
And these bruised temples keep  
Their pain, remembering thee  
And thy bloody sleep.

Be rent, O hair of mine head !

As a swan crying alone  
Where the river windeth cold,  
For a loved, for a silent one,  
Whom the toils of the fowler hold,  
I cry, Father, to thee,  
O slain in misery !

The water, the wan water, [Antistrophe 2  
Lapped him, and his head  
Drooped in the bed of slaughter  
Low, as one wearied ;  
Woe for the edgèd axe,  
And woe for the heart of hate,  
Houndlike about thy tracks,  
O conqueror desolate,  
From Troy over land and sea,  
Till a wife stood waiting thee ;  
Not with crowns did she stand,  
Nor flowers of peace in her hand ;  
With Aegisthus' dagger drawn  
For her hire she strove,  
Through shame and through blood alone ;  
And won her a traitor's love.

[As she ceases there enter from right and  
left the CHORUS, consisting of women of  
Argos, young and old, in festal dress.

## CHORUS.

*Some Women.*

Child of the mighty dead, [Strophe.  
Electra, lo, my way  
To thee in the dawn hath sped,  
And the cot on the mountain grey,  
For the Watcher hath cried this day :  
He of the ancient folk,  
The walker of waste and hill,  
Who drinketh the milk of the flock ;  
And he told of Hera's will ;  
For the morrow's morrow now  
They cry her festival,  
And before her throne shall bow  
Our damsels all.

## ELECTRA.

Not unto joy, nor sweet  
Music, nor shining of gold,  
The wings of my spirit beat.  
Let the brides of Argos hold  
Their dance in the night, as of old ;  
I lead no dance ; I mark  
No beat as the dancers sway ;  
With tears I dwell in the dark,  
And my thought is of tears alway,  
To the going down of the day.  
Look on my wasted hair  
And raiment. . . . This that I bear,

Is it meet for the King my sire,  
 And her whom the King begot ?  
 For Troy, that was burned with fire  
 And forgetteth not ?

CHORUS.

*Other Women.*

Hera is great !—Ah, come, [*Antistrophe.*  
 Be kind ; and my hand shall bring  
 Fair raiment, work of the loom,  
 And many a golden thing,  
 For joyous robe-wearing.  
 Deemest thou this thy woe  
 Shall rise unto God as prayer,  
 Or bend thine haters low ?  
 Doth God for thy pain have care ?  
 Not tears for the dead nor sighs,  
 But worship and joy divine  
 Shall win thee peace in thy skies,  
 O daughter mine !

ELECTRA.

No care cometh to God  
 For the voice of the helpless ; none  
 For the crying of ancient blood.  
 Alas for him that is gone,  
 And for thee, O wandering one :  
 That now, methinks, in a land  
 Of the stranger must toil for hire,  
 And stand where the poor men stand,  
 A-cold by another's fire,  
 O son of the mighty sire :

While I in a beggar's cot  
On the wrecked hills, changing not,  
Starve in my soul for food ;  
    But our mother lieth wed  
In another's arms, and blood  
    Is about her bed.

## LEADER.

On all of Greece she wrought great jeopardy,  
Thy mother's sister, Helen,—and on thee.

[ORESTES and PYLADES move out from their concealment ; ORESTES comes forward : PYLADES beckons to two ARMED SERVANTS and stays with them in the background.]

## ELECTRA.

Woe's me ! No more of wailing ! Women, flee !  
Strange armed men beside the dwelling there  
Lie ambushed ! They are rising from their lair.  
Back by the road, all you. I will essay  
The house ; and may our good feet save us !

ORESTES (*between ELECTRA and the hut*).

Unhappy woman ! Never fear my steel.

Stay,

ELECTRA (*in utter panic*).

O bright Apollo ! Mercy ! See, I kneel ;  
Slay me not.

## EURIPIDES

ORESTES.

Others I have yet to slay  
Less dear than thou.

ELECTRA.

Go from me ! Wouldst thou lay  
Hand on a body that is not for thee ?

ORESTES.

None is there I would touch more righteously.

ELECTRA.

Why lurk'st thou by my house ? And why a sword ?

ORESTES.

Stay. Listen ! Thou wilt not gainsay my word.

ELECTRA.

There—I am still. Do what thou wilt with me.  
Thou art too strong.

ORESTES.

A word I bear to thee . . .  
Word of thy brother.

ELECTRA.

Oh, friend ! More than friend !  
Living or dead ?

ORESTES.

He lives ; so let me send  
My comfort foremost, ere the rest be heard.

ELECTRA.

God love thee for the sweetness of thy word !

ORESTES.

God love the twain of us, both thee and me.

ELECTRA.

He lives ! Poor brother ! In what land weareth he  
His exile ?

ORESTES.

Not one region nor one lot  
His wasted life hath trod.

ELECTRA.

He lacketh not  
For bread ?

ORESTES.

Bread hath he ; but a man is weak  
In exile.

ELECTRA.

What charge laid he on thee ? Speak.

ORESTES.

To learn if thou still live, and how the storm,  
Living, hath struck thee.

ELECTRA.

That thou seest ; this form  
Wasted . . .

ORESTES.

Yea, riven with the fire of woe.  
I sigh to look on thee.

ELECTRA.

My face ; and, lo,  
My temples of their ancient glory shorn.

ORESTES.

Methinks thy brother haunts thee, being forlorn ;  
Aye, and perchance thy father, whom they slew. . .

ELECTRA.

What should be nearer to me than those two ?

ORESTES.

And what to him, thy brother, half so dear  
As thou ?

ELECTRA.

His is a distant love, not near  
At need.

ORESTES.

But why this dwelling place, this life  
Of loneliness ?

ELECTRA (*with sudden bitterness*).

Stranger, I am a wife. . . .  
O better dead !



ORESTES.

That seals thy brother's doom !  
What Prince of Argos . . . ?

ELECTRA.

Not the man to whom  
My father thought to give me.

ORESTES.

Speak ; that I  
May tell thy brother all.

ELECTRA.

'Tis there, hard by,  
His dwelling, where I live, far from men's eyes.

ORESTES.

Some ditcher's cot, or cowherd's, by its guise !

ELECTRA (*struck with shame for her ingratitude*).

A poor man ; but true-hearted, and to me  
God-fearing.

ORESTES.

How ? What fear of God hath he ?

ELECTRA.

He hath never held my body to his own.

ORESTES.

Hath he some vow to keep ? Or is it done  
To scorn thee ?

ELECTRA.

Nay ; he only scorns to sin  
Against my father's greatness.

ORESTES.

But to win  
A princess ! Doth his heart not leap for pride ?

ELECTRA.

He honoureth not the hand that gave the bride.

ORESTES.

I see. He trembles for Orestes' wrath ?

ELECTRA.

Aye, that would move him. But beside, he hath  
A gentle heart.

ORESTES.

Strange ! A good man. . . . I swear  
He well shall be requited.

ELECTRA.

Whensoever  
Our wanderer comes again !

ORESTES.

Thy mother stays  
Unmoved 'mid all thy wrong ?

ELECTRA.

A lover weighs  
More than a child in any woman's heart.

ORESTES.

But what end seeks Aegisthus, by such art  
Of shame ?

ELECTRA.

To make mine unborn children low  
And weak, even as my husband.

ORESTES.

Lest there grow  
From thee the avenger ?

ELECTRA.

Such his purpose is :  
For which may I requite him !

ORESTES.

And of this  
Thy virgin life—Aegisthus knows it ?

ELECTRA.

Nay,  
We speak it not. It cometh not his way.

ORESTES.

These women hear us. Are they friends to thee ?

ELECTRA.

Aye, friends and true. They will keep faithfully  
All words of mine and thine.

ORESTES (*trying her*).

Thou art well stayed  
With friends. And could Orestes give thee aid  
In aught, if e'er . . .

ELECTRA.

Shame on thee ! Seest thou not ?  
Is it not time ?

ORESTES (*catching her excitement*).

How time ? And if he sought  
To slay, how should he come at his desire ?

ELECTRA.

By daring, as they dared who slew his sire !

ORESTES.

Wouldst thou dare with him, if he came, thou too,  
To slay her ?

ELECTRA.

Yes ; with the same axe that slew  
My father !

ORESTES.

'Tis thy message ? And thy mood  
Unchanging ?

ELECTRA.

Let me shed my mother's blood,  
And I die happy.

ORESTES.

God ! . . . I would that now  
Orestes heard thee here.

ELECTRA.

Yet, wottest thou,  
Though here I saw him, I should know him not.

ORESTES.

Surely. Ye both were children, when they wrought  
Your parting.

ELECTRA.

One alone in all this land  
Would know his face.

ORESTES.

The thrall, methinks, whose hand  
Stole him from death—or so the story ran ?

ELECTRA.

He taught my father, too, an old old man  
Of other days than these.

ORESTES.

Thy father's grave . . .  
He had due rites and tendance ?

ELECTRA.

What chance gave,  
My father had, cast out to rot in the sun.

## ORESTES.

God, 'tis too much ! . . . To hear of such things done  
Even to a stranger, stings a man. . . . But speak,  
Tell of thy life, that I may know, and seek  
Thy brother with a tale that must be heard  
Howe'er it sicken. If mine eyes be blurred,  
Remember, 'tis the fool that feels not. Aye,  
Wisdom is full of pity ; and thereby  
Men pay for too much wisdom with much pain.

## LEADER.

My heart is moved as this man's. I would fain  
Learn all thy tale. Here dwelling on the hills  
Little I know of Argos and its ills.

## ELECTRA.

If I must speak—and at love's call, God knows,  
I fear not—I will tell thee all ; my woes,  
My father's woes, and—O, since thou hast stirred  
This storm of speech, thou bear him this my word—  
His woes and shame ! Tell of this narrow cloak  
In the wind ; this grime and reek of toil, that choke  
My breathing ; this low roof that bows my head  
After a king's. This raiment . . . thread by thread,  
'Tis I must weave it, or go bare—must bring,  
Myself, each jar of water from the spring.  
No holy day for me, no festival,  
No dance upon the green ! From all, from all  
I am cut off. No portion hath my life  
'Mid wives of Argos, being no true wife.  
No portion where the maidens throng to praise  
Castor—my Castor, whom in ancient days,

Ere he passed from us and men worshipped him,  
They named my bridegroom!—

And she, she! . . . The grim  
Troy spoils gleam round her throne, and by each  
hand

Queens of the East, my father's prisoners, stand,  
A cloud of Orient webs and tangling gold.  
And there upon the floor, the blood, the old  
Black blood, yet crawls and cankers, like a rot  
In the stone! And on our father's chariot  
The murderer's foot stands glorying, and the red  
False hand uplifts that ancient staff, that led  
The armies of the world! . . . Aye, tell him how  
The grave of Agamemnon, even now,  
Lacketh the common honour of the dead;  
A desert barrow, where no tears are shed,  
No tresses hung, no gift, no myrtle spray.  
And when the wine is in him, so men say,  
Our mother's mighty master leaps thereon,  
Spurning the slab, or pelteth stone on stone,  
Flouting the lone dead and the twain that live:  
"Where is thy son Orestes? Doth he give  
Thy tomb good tendance? Or is all forgot?"  
So is he scorned because he cometh not. . . .

O Stranger, on my knees, I charge thee, tell  
This tale, not mine, but of dumb wrongs that swell  
Crowding—and I the trumpet of their pain,  
This tongue, these arms, this bitter burning brain;  
These dead shorn locks, and he for whom they  
died!

His father slew Troy's thousands in their pride:  
He hath but one to kill. . . . O God, but one!  
Is he a man, and Agamemnon's son?

LEADER.

But hold : is this thy husband from the plain,  
His labour ended, hasting home again ?

*Enter the* PEASANT.

PEASANT.

Ha, who be these ? Strange men in arms before  
My house ! What would they at this lonely door ?  
Seek they for me ?—Strange gallants should not stay  
A woman's goings.

ELECTRA.

Friend and helper !—Nay,  
Think not of any evil. These men be  
Friends of Orestes, charged with words for me ! . . .  
Strangers, forgive his speech.

PEASANT.

What word have they  
Of him ? At least he lives and sees the day ?

ELECTRA.

So fares their tale—and sure I doubt it not !

PEASANT.

And ye two still are living in his thought,  
Thou and his father ?

ELECTRA.

In his dreams we live.  
An exile hath small power.



PEASANT.

And did he give  
Some privy message?

ELECTRA.

None : they come as spies  
For news of me.

PEASANT.

Thine outward news their eyes  
Can see ; the rest, methinks, thyself will tell.

ELECTRA.

They have seen all, heard all. I trust them well.

PEASANT.

Why were our doors not open long ago?—  
Be welcome, strangers both, and pass below  
My lintel. In return for your glad words  
Be sure all greeting that mine house affords.  
Is yours.—Ye followers, bear in their gear!—  
Gainsay me not ; for his sake are ye dear  
That sent you to our house ; and though my part  
In life be low, I am no churl at heart.

[*The PEASANT goes to the ARMED SERVANTS at  
the back, to help them with the baggage.*

ORESTES (*aside to ELECTRA*).

Is this the man that shields thy maidenhood  
Unknown, and will not wrong thy father's blood?

## ELECTRA.

He is called my husband. 'Tis for him I toil.

## ORESTES.

How dark lies honour hid ! And what turmoil  
In all things human : sons of mighty men  
Fallen to naught, and from ill seed again  
Good fruit : yea, famine in the rich man's scroll  
Writ deep, and in poor flesh a lordly soul.  
As, lo, this man, not great in Argos, not  
With pride of house uplifted, in a lot  
Of unmarked life hath shown a prince's grace.

[*To the PEASANT, who has returned.*]

All that is here of Agamemnon's race,  
And all that lacketh yet, for whom we come,  
Do thank thee, and the welcome of thy home  
Accept with gladness.—Ho, men ; hasten ye  
Within ! —This open-hearted poverty  
Is blither to my sense than feasts of gold.

Lady, thine husband's welcome makes me bold ;  
Yet would thou hadst thy brother, before all  
Confessed, to greet us in a prince's hall !  
Which may be, even yet. Apollo spake  
The word ; and surely, though small store I make  
Of man's divining, God will fail us not.

[*ORESTES and PYLADES go in, following the*

SERVANTS.

## LEADER.

O never was the heart of hope so hot  
Within me. How ? So moveless in time past,  
Hath Fortune girded up her loins at last ?

## ELECTRA.

Now know'st thou not thine own ill furniture,  
To bid these strangers in, to whom for sure  
Our best were hardship, men of gentle breed ?

## PEASANT.

Nay, if the men be gentle, as indeed  
I deem them, they will take good cheer or ill  
With even kindness.

## ELECTRA.

'Twas ill done ; but still—  
Go, since so poor thou art, to that old friend  
Who reared my father. At the realm's last end  
He dwells, where Tanaos river foams between  
Argos and Sparta. Long time hath he been  
An exile 'mid his flocks. Tell him what thing  
Hath chanced on me, and bid him haste and bring  
Meat for the strangers' tending.—Glad, I trow,  
That old man's heart will be, and many a vow  
Will lift to God, to learn the child he stole  
From death, yet breathes.—I will not ask a dole  
From home ; how should my mother help me ? Nay,  
I pity him that seeks that door, to say  
Orestes liveth !

## PEASANT.

Wilt thou have it so ?  
I will take word to the old man. But go  
Quickly within, and whatso there thou find  
Set out for them. A woman, if her mind  
So turn, can light on many a pleasant thing  
To fill her board. And surely plenishing  
We have for this one day.—'Tis in such shifts

As these, I care for riches, to make gifts  
 To friends, or lead a sick man back to health  
 With ease and plenty. Else small aid is wealth  
 For daily gladness ; once a man be done  
 With hunger, rich and poor are all as one.

[*The PEASANT goes off to the left ; ELECTRA goes  
 into the house.*

---

CHORUS.

O for the ships of Troy, the beat [*Strophe 1.*  
 Of oars that shimmered  
 Innumerable, and dancing feet  
 Of Nereids glimmered ;  
 And dolphins, drunken with the lyre,  
 Across the dark blue prows, like fire,  
 Did bound and quiver,  
 To cleave the way for Thetis' son,  
 Fleet-in-the-wind Achilles, on  
 To war, to war, till Troy be won  
 Beside the reedy river.

Up from Eubœa's caverns came [*Antistrophe 1.*  
 The Nereids, bearing  
 Gold armour from the Lords of Flame,  
 Wrought for his wearing :  
 Long sought those daughters of the deep,  
 Up Pelion's glen, up Ossa's steep  
 Forest enchanted,  
 Where Peleus reared alone, afar,  
 His lost sea-maiden's child, the star  
 Of Hellas, and swift help of war  
 When weary armies panted.

There came a man from Troy, and told [Strophe 2.

Here in the haven,  
How, orb on orb, to strike with cold  
The Trojan, o'er that targe of gold,  
Dread shapes were graven.  
All round the level rim thereof  
Perseus, on wingèd feet, above  
The long seas hied him ;  
The Gorgon's wild and bleeding hair  
He lifted ; and a herald fair,  
He of the wilds, whom Maia bare,  
God's Hermes, flew beside him.

[Antistrophe 2.

But midmost, where the boss rose higher,  
A sun stood blazing,  
And wingèd steeds, and stars in choir,  
Hyad and Pleiad, fire on fire,  
For Hector's dazing :  
Across the golden helm, each way,  
Two taloned Sphinxes held their prey,  
Song-drawn to slaughter :  
And round the breastplate ramping came  
A mingled breed of lion and flame,  
Hot-eyed to tear that steed of fame  
That found Pirênê's water.

The red red sword with steeds four-yoked [Epode.  
Black-maned, was graven,  
That laboured, and the hot dust smoked  
Cloudwise to heaven.

Thou Tyndarid woman ! Fair and tall  
Those warriors were, and o'er them all

One king great-hearted,  
Whom thou and thy false love did slay :  
Therefore the tribes of Heaven one day  
For these thy dead shall send on thee  
An iron death : yea, men shall see  
The white throat drawn, and blood's red spray,  
And lips in terror parted.

*[As they cease, there enters from the left a very  
old man, bearing a lamb, a wineskin, and  
a wallet.]*

### OLD MAN.

Where is my little Princess ? Ah, not now ;  
But still my queen, who tended long ago  
The lad that was her father. . . . How steep-set  
These last steps to her porch ! But faint not yet :  
Onward, ye failing knees and back with pain  
Bowed, till we look on that dear face again.

*[Enter ELECTRA.]*

Ah, daughter, is it thou ?—Lo, here I am,  
With gifts from all my store ; this suckling lamb  
Fresh from the ewe, green crowns for joyfulness,  
And creamy things new-curdled from the press.  
And this long-stored juice of vintages  
Forgotten, cased in fragrance : scant it is,  
But passing sweet to mingle nectar-wise  
With feebler wine.—Go, bear them in ; mine eyes . . .  
Where is my cloak ?—They are all blurred with  
tears.

## ELECTRA.

What ails thine eyes, old friend? After these years  
Doth my low plight still stir thy memories?  
Or think'st thou of Orestes, where he lies  
In exile, and my father? Aye, long love  
Thou gavest him, and seest the fruit thereof  
Wasted, for thee and all who love thee!

## OLD MAN.

All

Wasted! And yet 'tis that lost hope withal  
I cannot brook. But now I turned aside  
To see my master's grave. All, far and wide,  
Was silence; so I bent these knees of mine  
And wept and poured drink-offerings from the wine  
I bear the strangers, and about the stone  
Laid myrtle sprays. And, child, I saw thereon  
Just at the censer slain, a fleecèd ewe,  
Deep black, in sacrifice: the blood was new  
About it: and a tress of bright brown hair  
Shorn as in mourning, close. Long stood I there  
And wondered, of all men what man had gone  
In mourning to that grave.—My child, 'tis none  
In Argos. Did there come . . . Nay, mark me  
now . . .

Thy brother in the dark, last night, to bow  
His head before that unadorèd tomb?

O come, and mark the colour of it. Come  
And lay thine own hair by that mourner's tress!  
A hundred little things make likenesses  
In brethren born, and show the father's blood.

ELECTRA (*trying to mask her excitement and resist the contagion of his*).

Old heart, old heart, is this a wise man's mood? . . .  
 O, not in darkness, not in fear of men,  
 Shall Argos find him, when he comes again,  
 Mine own undaunted . . . Nay, and if it were,  
 What likeness could there be? My brother's hair  
 Is as a prince's and a rover's, strong  
 With sunlight and with strife: not like the long  
 Locks that a woman combs. . . . And many a head  
 Hath this same semblance, wing for wing, tho' bred  
 Of blood not ours. . . . 'Tis hopeless. Peace, old  
 man.

OLD MAN.

The footprints! Set thy foot by his, and scan  
 The track of frame and muscles, how they fit!

ELECTRA.

That ground will take no footprint! All of it  
 Is bitter stone. . . . It hath? . . . And who hath  
 said

There should be likeness in a brother's tread  
 And sister's? His is stronger every way.

OLD MAN.

But hast thou nothing . . . ? If he came this day  
 And sought to show thee, is there no one sign  
 Whereby to know him? . . . Stay; the robe was  
 thine,

Work of thy loom, wherein I wrapt him o'er  
 That night, and stole him through the murderers' door.



ELECTRA.

Thou knowest, when Orestes was cast out  
I was a child. . . . If I did weave some clout  
Of raiment, would he keep the vesture now  
He wore in childhood? Should my weaving grow  
As his limbs grew? . . . 'Tis lost long since. No  
more!

O, either 'twas some stranger passed, and shore  
His locks for very ruth before that tomb:  
Or, if he found perchance, to seek his home,  
Some spy . . .

OLD MAN.

The strangers! Where are they? I fain  
Would see them, aye, and bid them answer plain . . .

ELECTRA.

Here at the door! How swift upon the thought!

*Enter ORESTES and PYLADES.*

OLD MAN.

High-born: albeit for that I trust them not.  
The highest oft are false. . . . Howe'er it be,  
[*Approaching them.*]  
I bid the strangers hail!

ORESTES.

All hail to thee,  
Greybeard!—Prithee, what man of all the King  
Trusted of old, is now this broken thing?

ELECTRA.

'Tis he that trained my father's boyhood.

ORESTES.

How ?  
And stole from death thy brother ? Sayest thou ?

ELECTRA.

This man was his deliverer, if it be  
Deliverance.

ORESTES.

How his old eye pierceth me,  
As one that testeth silver and alloy !  
Sees he some likeness here ?

ELECTRA.

Perchance 'tis joy,  
To see Orestes' comrade, that he feels.

ORESTES.

None dearer.—But what ails the man ? He reels  
Dizzily back.

ELECTRA.

I marvel. I can say  
No more.

OLD MAN (*in a broken voice*).

Electra, mistress, daughter, pray !  
Pray unto God !

ELECTRA.

Of all things I crave,  
The thousand things, or all that others have,  
What should I pray for ?

OLD MAN.

Pray thine arms may hold  
At last this treasure-dream of more than gold  
God shows us !

ELECTRA.

God, I pray thee ! . . . Wouldst thou more ?

OLD MAN.

Gaze now upon this man, and bow before  
Thy dearest upon earth !

ELECTRA.

I gaze on thee !  
O, hath time made thee mad ?

OLD MAN.

Mad, that I see  
Thy brother ?

ELECTRA.

My . . . I know not what thou say'st :  
I looked not for it . . .

OLD MAN.

I tell thee, here confessed  
Standeth Orestes, Agamemnon's son !

ELECTRA.

A sign before I trust thee ! O, but one !  
How dost thou know . . . ?

OLD MAN.

There, by his brow, I see  
The scar he made, that day he ran with thee  
Chasing thy fawn, and fell.

ELECTRA (*in a dull voice*).

A scar? 'Tis so.

I see a scar.

OLD MAN.

And fearest still to throw  
Thine arms round him thou lovest?

ELECTRA.

O, no more!  
Thy sign hath conquered me. . . . (*throwing herself*  
*into ORESTES' arms*). At last, at last!  
Thy face like light! And do I hold thee fast,  
Unhoped for?

ORESTES.

Yea, at last! And I hold thee.

ELECTRA.

I never knew . . .

ORESTES.

I dreamed not.

ELECTRA.

Is it he,

Orestes?

## ORESTES.

Thy defender, yea, alone  
To fight the world ! Lo, this day have I thrown  
A net, which once unbroken from the sea  
Drawn home, shall . . . O, and it must surely be !  
Else men shall know there is no God, no light  
In Heaven, if wrong to the end shall conquer right.

## CHORUS.

Comest thou, comest thou now,  
Chained by the years and slow,  
O Day long sought ?  
A light on the mountains cold  
Is lit, yea, a fire burneth.  
'Tis the light of one that turneth  
From roamings manifold,  
Back out of exile old  
To the house that knew him not.

Some spirit hath turned our way,  
Victory visible,  
Walking at thy right hand,  
Belovèd ; O lift this day  
Thine arms, thy voice, as a spell ;  
And pray for thy brother, pray,  
Threading the perilous land,  
That all be well !

## ORESTES.

Enough ; this dear delight is mine at last  
Of thine embracing ; and the hour comes fast

When we shall stand again as now we stand,  
 And stint not.—Stay, Old Man : thou, being at hand  
 At the edge of time, advise me, by what way  
 Best to requite my father's murderers. Say,  
 Have I in Argos any still to trust ;  
 Or is the love, once borne me, trod in dust,  
 Even as my fortunes are ? Whom shall I seek ?  
 By day or night ? And whither turn, to wreak  
 My will on them that hate us ? Say.

OLD MAN.

My son,

In thine adversity, there is not one  
 Will call thee friend. Nay, that were treasure-trove,  
 A friend to share, not faltering from love,  
 Fair days and foul the same. Thy name is gone  
 Forth to all Argos, as a thing o'erthrown  
 And dead. Thou hast not left one spark to glow  
 With hope in one friend's heart ! Hear all, and  
 know :

Thou hast God's fortune and thine own right hand,  
 Naught else, to conquer back thy fatherland.

ORESTES.

The deed, the deed ! What must we do ?

OLD MAN.

Strike down

Aegisthus . . . and thy mother.

ORESTES.

'Tis the crown

My race is run for. But how find him ?

OLD MAN.

Not

Within the city walls, however hot  
Thy spirit.

ORESTES.

Ha ! With watchers doth he go  
Begirt, and mailed pikemen ?

OLD MAN.

Even so :

He lives in fear of thee, and night nor day  
Hath slumber.

ORESTES.

That way blocked !—'Tis thine to say  
What next remains.

OLD MAN.

I will ; and thou give ear.  
A thought has found me !

ORESTES.

All good thoughts be near,  
For thee to speak and me to understand !

OLD MAN.

But now I saw Aegisthus, close at hand  
As here I journeyed.

ORESTES.

That good word shall trace  
My path for me ! Thou saw'st him ? In what place ?

OLD MAN.

Out on the pastures where his horses stray.

ORESTES.

What did he there so far?—A gleam of day  
Crosseth our darkness.

OLD MAN.

'Twas a feast, methought,  
Of worship to the wild-wood nymphs he wrought.

ORESTES.

The watchers of men's birth? Is there a son  
New born to him, or doth he pray for one  
That cometh? [*Movement of ELECTRA.*]

OLD MAN.

More I know not; he had there  
A wreathèd ox, as for some weighty prayer.

ORESTES.

What force was with him? Not his serfs alone?

OLD MAN.

No Argive lord was there; none but his own  
Household.

ORESTES.

Not any that might know my race,  
Or guess?

OLD MAN.

Thralls, thralls; who ne'er have seen thy face.



ORESTES.

Once I prevail, the thralls will welcome me !

OLD MAN.

The slaves' way, that ; and no ill thing for thee !

ORESTES.

How can I once come near him ?

OLD MAN.

Walk thy ways

Hard by, where he may see thee, ere he slays

His sacrifice.

ORESTES.

How ? Is the road so nigh ?

OLD MAN.

He cannot choose but see thee, passing by,

And bid thee stay to share the beast they kill.

ORESTES.

A bitter fellow-feaster, if God will !

OLD MAN.

And then . . . then swift be heart and brain, to see  
God's chances !

ORESTES.

Aye. Well hast thou counselled me.  
But . . . where is she ?

OLD MAN.

In Argos now, I guess ;  
But goes to join her husband, ere the press  
Of the feast.

ORESTES.

Why goeth not my mother straight  
Forth at her husband's side ?

OLD MAN.

She fain will wait  
Until the gathered country-folk be gone.

ORESTES.

Enough ! She knows what eyes are turned upon  
Her passings in the land !

OLD MAN.

Aye, all men hate  
The unholy woman.

ORESTES.

How then can I set  
My snare for wife and husband in one breath ?

ELECTRA (*coming forward*).

Hold ! It is I must work our mother's death.

ORESTES.

If that be done, I think the other deed  
Fortune will guide.

ELECTRA.

This man must help our need,  
One friend alone for both.

OLD MAN.

He will, he will !  
Speak on. What cunning hast thou found to fill  
Thy purpose ?

ELECTRA.

Get thee forth, Old Man, and quick  
Tell Clytemnestra . . . tell her I lie sick,  
New-mothered of a man-child.

OLD MAN.

Thou hast borne  
A son ! But when ?

ELECTRA.

Let this be the tenth morn.  
Till then a mother stays in sanctity,  
Unseen.

OLD MAN.

And if I tell her, where shall be  
The death in this ?

ELECTRA.

That word let her but hear,  
Straight she will seek me out !

OLD MAN.

                                    The queen !   What care  
Hath she for thee, or pain of thine ?

ELECTRA.

                                    She will ;  
And weep my babe's low station !

OLD MAN.

                                    Thou hast skill  
To know her, child ; say on.

ELECTRA.

                                    But bring her here,  
Here to my hand ; the rest will come.

OLD MAN.

                                    I swear,  
Here at the gate she shall stand palpable !

ELECTRA.

The gate : the gate that leads to me and Hell.

OLD MAN.

Let me but see it, and I die content.

ELECTRA.

First, then, my brother : see his steps be bent . . .

OLD MAN.

Straight yonder, where Aegisthus makes his prayer !

ELECTRA.

Then seek my mother's presence, and declare  
My news.

OLD MAN.

Thy very words, child, as tho' spoke  
From thine own lips !

ELECTRA.

Brother, thine hour is struck.  
Thou standest in the van of war this day.

ORESTES (*rousing himself*).

Aye, I am ready. . . . I will go my way,  
If but some man will guide me.

OLD MAN.

Here am I,  
To speed thee to the end, right thankfully.

ORESTES (*turning as he goes and raising his hands to  
heaven*).

Zeus of my sires, Zeus of the lost battle,

ELECTRA.

Have pity ; have pity ; we have earned it well !

OLD MAN.

Pity these twain, of thine own body sprung !

ELECTRA.

O Queen o'er Argive altars, Hera high,

ORESTES.

Grant us thy strength, if for the right we cry.

OLD MAN.

Strength to these twain, to right their father's wrong

ELECTRA.

O Earth, deep Earth, to whom I yearn in vain,

ORESTES.

And deeper thou, O father darkly slain,

OLD MAN.

Thy children call, who love thee : hearken thou !

ORESTES.

Girt with thine own dead armies, wake, O wake !

ELECTRA.

With all that died at Ilion for thy sake . . .

OLD MAN.

And hate earth's dark defilers ; help us now !

ELECTRA.

Dost hear us yet, O thou in deadly wrong,  
Wronged by my mother ?

OLD MAN.

Child, we stay too long  
He hears ; be sure he hears !

ELECTRA.

And while he hears  
I speak this word for omen in his ears :

"Aegisthus dies, Aegisthus dies." . . . Ah me,  
My brother, should it strike not him, but thee,  
This wrestling with dark death, behold, I too  
Am dead that hour. Think of me as one true,  
Not one that lives. I have a sword made keen  
For this, and shall strike deep.

I will go in  
And make all ready. If there come from thee  
Good tidings, all my house for ecstasy  
Shall cry ; and if we hear that thou art dead,  
Then comes the other end !—Lo, I have said.

ORESTES.

I know all, all.

ELECTRA.

Then be a man to-day !

[ORESTES *and the OLD MAN depart.*

O Women, let your voices from this fray  
Flash me a fiery signal, where I sit,  
The sword across my knees, expecting it.  
For never, though they kill me, shall they touch  
My living limbs !—I know my way thus much.  
[*She goes into the house.*

---

CHORUS.

When white-haired folk are met                    [*Strophe.*  
In Argos about the fold,  
A story lingereth yet,  
A voice of the mountains old,  
That tells of the Lamb of Gold :

A lamb from a mother mild,  
But the gold of it curled and beat ;  
And Pan, who holdeth the keys of the wild,  
Bore it to Atreus' feet :  
His wild reed pipes he blew,  
And the reeds were filled with peace,  
And a joy of singing before him flew,  
Over the fiery fleece :  
And up on the basèd rock,  
As a herald cries, cried he :  
"Gather ye, gather, O Argive folk,  
The King's Sign to see,  
The sign of the blest of God,  
For he that hath this, hath all !"  
Therefore the dance of praise they trod  
In the Atreïd brethren's hall.

They opened before men's eyes [Antistrophe.  
That which was hid before,  
The chambers of sacrifice,  
The dark of the golden door,  
And fires on the altar floor.  
And bright was every street,  
And the voice of the Muses' tree,  
The carven lotus, was lifted sweet ;  
When afar and suddenly,  
Strange songs, and a voice that grew :  
"Come to your king, ye folk !  
Mine, mine, is the Golden Ewe !"  
'Twas dark Thyestes spoke.  
For, lo, when the world was still,  
With his brother's bride he lay,  
And won her to work his will,  
And they stole the Lamb away !



Then forth to the folk strode he,  
And called them about his fold,  
And showed that Sign of the King to be,  
'The fleece and the horns of gold.

Then, then, the world was changed ;      [*Strophe 2.*  
And the Father, where they ranged,  
Shook the golden stars and glowing,  
And the great Sun stood deranged  
In the glory of his going.

Lo, from that day forth, the East  
Bears the sunrise on his breast,  
And the flaming Day in heaven  
Down the dim ways of the west  
Driveth, to be lost at even.

The wet clouds to Northward beat ;  
And Lord Ammon's desert seat  
Crieth from the South, unslaken,  
For the dews that once were sweet,  
For the rain that God hath taken.

'Tis a children's tale, that old      [*Antistrophe 2.*  
Shepherds on far hills have told ;  
And we reck not of their telling,  
Deem not that the Sun of gold  
Ever turned his fiery dwelling,

Or beat backward in the sky,  
For the wrongs of man, the cry  
Of his ailing tribes assembled,  
To do justly, ere they die !  
Once, men told the tale, and trembled ;

Fearing God, O Queen : whom thou  
 Hast forgotten, till thy brow  
 With old blood is dark and daunted.  
 And thy brethren, even now,  
 Walk among the stars, enchanted.

LEADER.

Ha, friends, was that a voice? Or some dream  
 sound  
 Of voices shaketh me, as underground  
 God's thunder shuddering? Hark, again, and clear!  
 It swells upon the wind.—Come forth and hear!  
 Mistress, Electra!

ELECTRA, *a bare sword in her hand, comes  
 from the house.*

ELECTRA.

Friends! Some news is brought?  
 How hath the battle ended?

LEADER.

I know naught.  
 There seemed a cry as of men massacred!

ELECTRA.

I heard it too. Far off, but still I heard.

LEADER.

A distant floating voice . . . Ah, plainer now!

ELECTRA.

Of Argive anguish !—Brother, is it thou !

LEADER.

I know not. Many confused voices cry . . .

ELECTRA.

Death, then for me ! That answer bids me die.

LEADER.

Nay, wait ! We know not yet thy fortune. Wait !

ELECTRA.

No messenger from him !—Too late, too late !

LEADER.

The message yet will come. 'Tis not a thing  
So light of compass, to strike down a king.

*Enter a MESSENGER, running.*

MESSENGER.

Victory, Maids of Argos, Victory !  
Orestes . . . all that love him, list to me ! . . .  
Hath conquered ! Agamemnon's murderer lies  
Dead ! O give thanks to God with happy cries !

ELECTRA.

Who art thou ? I mistrust thee. . . . 'Tis a plot !

MESSENGER.

Thy brother's man. Look well. Dost know me not ?

## ELECTRA.

Friend, friend ; my terror made me not to see  
 Thy visage. Now I know and welcome thee.  
 How sayst thou ? He is dead, verily dead,  
 My father's murderer . . . ?

## MESSENGER.

Shall it be said

Once more ? I know again and yet again  
 Thy heart would hear. Aegisthus lieth slain !

## ELECTRA.

Ye Gods ! And thou, O Right, that seest all,  
 Art come at last ? . . . But speak ; how did he fall ?  
 How swooped the wing of death ? . . . I crave  
 to hear.

## MESSENGER.

Forth of this hut we set our faces clear  
 To the world, and struck the open chariot road ;  
 Then on toward the pasture lands, where stood  
 The great Lord of Mycenae. In a set  
 Garden beside a channelled rivulet,  
 Culling a myrtle garland for his brow,  
 He walked : but hailed us as we passed : " How now,  
 Strangers ! Who are ye ? Of what city sprung,  
 And whither bound ? " " Thessalians," answered  
 young

Orestes : " to Alpheüs journeying,  
 With gifts to Olympian Zeus." Whereat the king :  
 " This while, beseech you, tarry, and make full  
 The feast upon my hearth. We slay a bull

Here to the Nymphs. Set forth at break of day  
To-morrow, and 'twill cost you no delay.  
But come"—and so he gave his hand, and led  
The two men in—"I must not be gainsaid ;  
Come to the house. Ho, there ; set close at hand  
Vats of pure water, that the guests may stand  
At the altar's verge, where falls the holy spray."  
Then quickly spake Orestes : "By the way  
We cleansed us in a torrent stream. We need  
No purifying here. But if indeed  
Strangers may share thy worship, here are we  
Ready, O King, and swift to follow thee."

So spoke they in the midst. And every thrall  
Laid down the spears they served the King withal,  
And hied him to the work. Some bore amain  
The death-vat, some the corbs of hallowed grain ;  
Or kindled fire, and round the fire and in  
Set cauldrons foaming ; and a festal din  
Filled all the place. Then took thy mother's lord  
The ritual grains, and o'er the altar poured  
Its due, and prayed : "O Nymphs of Rock and  
Mere,

With many a sacrifice for many a year,  
May I and she who waits at home for me,  
My Tyndarid Queen, adore you. May it be  
Peace with us always, even as now ; and all  
Ill to mine enemies"—meaning withal  
Thee and Orestes. Then my master prayed  
Against that prayer, but silently, and said  
No word, to win once more his fatherland.  
Then in the corb Aegisthus set his hand,  
Took the straight blade, cut from the proud bull's head  
A lock, and laid it where the fire was red ;

Then, while the young men held the bull on high,  
Slew it with one clean gash ; and suddenly  
Turned on thy brother : “ Stranger, every true  
Thessalian, so the story goes, can hew  
A bull’s limbs clean, and tame a mountain steed.  
Take up the steel, and show us if indeed  
Rumour speak true.” Right swift Orestes took  
The Dorian blade, back from his shoulders shook  
His broochèd mantle, called on Pylades  
To aid him, and waved back the thralls. With ease  
Heelwise he held the bull, and with one glide  
Bared the white limb ; then stripped the mighty  
hide

From off him, swifter than a runner runs  
His furlongs, and laid clean the flank. At once  
Aegisthus stooped, and lifted up with care  
The ominous parts, and gazed. No lobe was there ;  
But lo, strange caves of gall, and, darkly raised,  
The portal vein boded to him that gazed  
Fell visitations. Dark as night his brow  
Clouded. Then spake Orestes : “ Why art thou  
Cast down so sudden ? ” “ Guest,” he cried, “ there be  
Treasons from whence I know not, seeking me.  
Of all my foes, ’tis Agamemnon’s son ;  
His hate is on my house, like war.” “ Have done ! ”  
Orestes cried : “ thou fear’st an exile’s plot,  
Lord of a city ? Make thy cold heart hot  
With meat.—Ho, fling me a Thessalian steel !  
This Dorian is too light. I will unseal  
The breast of him.” He took the heavier blade,  
And clave the bone. And there Aegisthus stayed,  
The omens in his hand, dividing slow  
This sign from that ; till, while his head bent low,

Up with a leap thy brother flashed the sword,  
Then down upon his neck, and cleft the cord  
Of brain and spine. Shuddering the body stood  
One instant in an agony of blood,  
And gasped and fell. The henchmen saw, and  
straight

Flew to their spears, a host of them to set  
Against those twain. But there the twain did  
stand

Unfaltering, each his iron in his hand,  
Edge fronting edge. Till "Hold," Orestes calls :  
"I come not as in wrath against these walls  
And mine own people. One man righteously  
I have slain, who slew my father. It is I,  
The wronged Orestes ! Hold, and smite me not,  
Old housefolk of my father !" When they caught  
That name, their lances fell. And one old man,  
An ancient in the house, drew nigh to scan  
His face, and knew him. Then with one accord  
They crowned thy brother's temples, and outpoured  
Joy and loud songs. And hither now he fares  
To show the head, no Gorgon, that he bears,  
But that Aegisthus whom thou hatest ! Yea,  
Blood against blood, his debt is paid this day.

*[He goes off to meet the others—ELECTRA stands  
as though stupefied.]*

#### CHORUS.

Now, now thou shalt dance in our dances,  
Beloved, as a fawn in the night !  
The wind is astir for the glances  
Of thy feet ; thou art robed with delight.

He hath conquered, he cometh to free us  
 With garlands new-won,  
 More high than the crowns of Alpheüs,  
 Thine own father's son :  
 Cry, cry, for the day that is won !

## ELECTRA.

O Light of the Sun, O chariot wheels of flame,  
 O Earth and Night, dead Night without a name  
 That held me ! Now mine eyes are raised to see,  
 And all the doorways of my soul flung free.  
 Aegisthus dead ! My father's murderer dead !

What have I still of wreathing for the head  
 Stored in my chambers ? Let it come forth now  
 To bind my brother's and my conqueror's brow.

*[Some garlands are brought out from the house to*  
 ELECTRA.

## CHORUS.

Go, gather thy garlands, and lay them  
 As a crown on his brow, many-tressed,  
 But our feet shall refrain not nor stay them :  
 'Tis the joy that the Muses have blest.  
 For our king is returned as from prison,  
 The old king, to be master again,  
 Our belovèd in justice re-risen :  
 With guile he hath slain . . .  
 But cry, cry in joyance again !

*[There enter from the left ORESTES and PYLADES,  
 followed by some thralls.*



## ELECTRA.

O conqueror, come ! The king that trampled Troy  
Knoweth his son Orestes. Come in joy,  
Brother, and take to bind thy rippling hair  
My crowns ! . . . O what are crowns, that runners  
wear

For some vain race ? But thou in battle true  
Hast felled our foe Aegisthus, him that slew  
By craft thy sire and mine. [*She crowns* ORESTES.

And thou no less,

O friend at need, O reared in righteousness,  
Take, Pylades, this chaplet from my hand.

'Twas half thy battle. And may ye two stand  
Thus alway, victory-crowned, before my face !

[*She crowns* PYLADES.

## ORESTES.

Electra, first as workers of this grace  
Praise thou the Gods, and after, if thou will,  
Praise also me, as chosen to fulfil  
God's work and Fate's. — Aye, 'tis no more a  
dream ;

In very deed I come from slaying him.  
Thou hast the knowledge clear, but lo, I bring  
More also. See himself, dead !

[*Attendants bring in the body of* AEGISTHUS *on a bier.*

Wouldst thou fling

This lord on the rotting earth for beasts to tear ?  
Or up, where all the vultures of the air  
May glut them, pierce and nail him for a sign  
Far off ? Work all thy will. Now he is thine.

ELECTRA.

It shames me ; yet, God knows, I hunger sore—

ORESTES.

What wouldst thou ? Speak ; the old fear nevermore  
Need touch thee.

ELECTRA.

To let loose upon the dead  
My hate ! Perchance to rouse on mine own head  
The sleeping hate of the world ?

ORESTES.

No man that lives  
Shall scathe thee by one word.

ELECTRA.

Our city gives  
Quick blame ; and little love have men for me.

ORESTES.

If aught thou hast unsaid, sister, be free  
And speak. Between this man and us no bar  
Cometh nor stint, but the utter rage of war.

*[She goes and stands over the body. A moment's  
silence.]*

ELECTRA.

Ah me, what have I ? What first flood of hate  
To loose upon thee ? What last curse to sate  
My pain, or river of wild words to flow  
Bank-high between ? . . . Nothing ? . . . And yet  
I know

There hath not passed one sun, but through the long  
Cold dawns, over and over, like a song,  
I have said them—words held back, O, some day yet  
To flash into thy face, would but the fret  
Of ancient fear fall loose and let me free.  
And free I am, now ; and can pay to thee  
At last the weary debt.

Oh, thou didst kill

My soul within. Who wrought thee any ill,  
That thou shouldst make me fatherless ? Aye, me  
And this my brother, loveless, solitary ?  
'Twas thou, didst bend my mother to her shame :  
Thy weak hand murdered him who led to fame  
The hosts of Hellas—thou, that never crossed  
O'erseas to Troy ! . . . God help thee, wast thou lost  
In blindness, long ago, dreaming, some-wise,  
She would be true with thee, whose sin and lies  
Thyself had tasted in my father's place ?  
And then, that thou wert happy, when thy days  
Were all one pain ? Thou knewest ceaselessly  
Her kiss a thing unclean, and she knew thee  
A lord so little true, so dearly won !  
So lost ye both, being in falseness one,  
What fortune else had granted ; she thy curse,  
Who marred thee as she loved thee, and thou hers . . .  
And on thy ways thou heardest men whispering,  
“ Lo, the Queen's husband yonder ”—not “ the King.”

And then the lie of lies that dimmed thy brow,  
Vaunting that by thy gold, thy chattels, Thou  
Wert Something ; which themselves are nothingness,  
Shadows, to clasp a moment ere they cease.  
The thing thou art, and not the things thou hast,  
Abideth, yea, and bindeth to the last

Thy burden on thee : while all else, ill-won  
And sin-companioned, like a flower o'erblown,  
Flies on the wind away.

Or didst thou find  
In women . . . Women? . . . Nay, peace, peace !

The blind  
Could read thee. Cruel wast thou in thine hour,  
Lord of a great king's house, and like a tower  
Firm in thy beauty.

*[Starting back with a look of loathing.*

Ah, that girl-like face !  
God grant, not that, not that, but some plain grace  
Of manhood to the man who brings me love :  
A father of straight children, that shall move  
Swift on the wings of War.

So, get thee gone !  
Naught knowing how the great years, rolling on,  
Have laid thee bare, and thy long debt full paid.

O vaunt not, if one step be proudly made  
In evil, that all Justice is o'ercast :  
Vaunt not, ye men of sin, ere at the last  
The thin-drawn marge before you glimmereth  
Close, and the goal that wheels 'twixt life and death.

#### LEADER.

Justice is mighty. Passing dark hath been  
His sin : and dark the payment of his sin.

ELECTRA (*with a weary sigh, turning from the body*).  
Ah me ! Go some of you, bear him from sight,  
That when my mother come, her eyes may light  
On nothing, nothing, till she know the sword . . .

*[The body is borne into the hut. PYLADES goes with it.*

ORESTES (*looking along the road*).

Stay, 'tis a new thing ! We have still a word  
To speak . . .

ELECTRA.

What ? Not a rescue from the town  
Thou seest ?

ORESTES.

'Tis my mother comes : my own  
Mother, that bare me. [*He takes off his crown.*]

ELECTRA (*springing, as it were, to life again, and  
moving where she can see the road*).

Straight into the snare !  
Aye, there she cometh.—Welcome in thy rare  
Chariot ! All welcome in thy brave array !

ORESTES.

What would we with our mother ? Didst thou say  
Kill her ?

ELECTRA (*turning on him*).

What ? Is it pity ? Dost thou fear  
To see thy mother's shape ?

ORESTES.

'Twas she that bare  
My body into life. She gave me suck.  
How can I strike her ?

ELECTRA.

Strike her as she struck

Our father !

ORESTES (*to himself, brooding*).

Phoebus, God, was all thy mind  
Turned unto darkness ?

ELECTRA.

If thy God be blind,  
Shalt thou have light ?

ORESTES (*as before*).

Thou, thou, didst bid me kill  
My mother : which is sin.

ELECTRA.

How brings it ill  
To thee, to raise our father from the dust ?

ORESTES.

I was a clean man once. Shall I be thrust  
From men's sight, blotted with her blood ?

ELECTRA.

Thy blot  
Is black as death if him thou succour not !

ORESTES.

Who shall do judgment on me, when she dies ?

ELECTRA.

Who shall do judgment, if thy father lies  
Forgotten?

ORESTES (*turning suddenly to ELECTRA*).

Stay! How if some fiend of Hell,  
Hid in God's likeness, spake that oracle?

ELECTRA.

In God's own house? I trow not.

ORESTES.

And I trow  
It was an evil charge! [*He moves away from her.*]

ELECTRA (*almost despairing*).

To fail me now!  
To fail me now! A coward!—O brother, no!

ORESTES.

What shall it be, then? The same stealthy blow . . .

ELECTRA.

That slew our father! Courage! thou hast slain  
Aegisthus.

ORESTES.

Aye. So be it.—I have ta'en  
A path of many terrors: and shall do  
Deeds horrible. 'Tis God will have it so. . . .  
Is this the joy of battle, or wild woe?  
[*He goes into the house.*]

## LEADER.

O Queen o'er Argos thronèd high,  
 O Woman, sister of the twain,  
 God's Horsemen, stars without a stain,  
 Whose home is in the deathless sky,  
 Whose glory in the sea's wild pain,  
 Toiling to succour men that die :  
 Long years above us hast thou been,  
 God-like for gold and marvelled power :  
 Ah, well may mortal eyes this hour  
 Observe thy state : All hail, O Queen !

*Enter from the right CLYTEMNESTRA on a chariot,  
 accompanied by richly dressed Handmaidens.*

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

Down from the wain, ye dames of Troy, and hold  
 Mine arm as I dismount. . . .

[*Answering ELECTRA's thought.*

The spoils and gold  
 Of Ilion I have sent out of my hall  
 To many shrines. These bondwomen are all  
 I keep in mine own house . . . Deemst thou the  
 cost  
 Too rich to pay me for the child I lost—  
 Fair though they be ?

## ELECTRA.

Nay, Mother, here am I  
 Bond likewise, yea, and homeless, to hold high  
 Thy royal arm !



CLYTEMNESTRA.

Child, the war-slaves are here ;  
Thou needst not toil.

ELECTRA.

What was it but the spear  
Of war, drove me forth too ? Mine enemies  
Have sacked my father's house, and, even as these,  
Captives and fatherless, made me their prey.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

It was thy father cast his child away,  
A child he might have loved ! . . . Shall I speak  
out ?

(*Controlling herself*) Nay ; when a woman once is  
caught about

With evil fame, there riseth in her tongue  
A bitter spirit—wrong, I know ! Yet, wrong  
Or right, I charge ye look on the deeds done ;  
And if ye needs must hate, when all is known,  
Hate on ! What profits loathing ere ye know ?

My father gave me to be his. 'Tis so.  
But was it his to kill me, or to kill  
The babes I bore ? Yet, lo, he tricked my will  
With fables of Achilles' love : he bore  
To Aulis and the dark ship-clutching shore,  
He held above the altar-flame, and smote,  
Cool as one reaping, through the strained throat,  
My white Iphigenia. . . . Had it been  
To save some falling city, leaguered in

With foemen ; to prop up our castle towers,  
And rescue other children that were ours,  
Giving one life for many, by God's laws  
I had forgiven all ! Not so. Because  
Helen was wanton, and her master knew  
No curb for her : for that, for that, he slew  
My daughter !—Even then, with all my wrong,  
No wild beast yet was in me. Nay, for long,  
I never would have killed him. But he came,  
At last, bringing that damsel, with the flame  
Of God about her, mad and knowing all :  
And set her in my room ; and in one wall  
Would hold two queens !—O wild are woman's eyes  
And hot her heart. I say not otherwise.  
But, being thus wild, if then her master stray  
To love far off, and cast his own away,  
Shall not her will break prison too, and wend  
Somewhere to win some other for a friend ?  
And then on us the world's curse waxes strong  
In righteousness ! The lords of all the wrong  
Must hear no curse !—I slew him. I trod then  
The only road : which led me to the men  
He hated. Of the friends of Argos whom  
Durst I have sought, to aid me to the doom  
I craved ?—Speak if thou wouldst, and fear not me,  
If yet thou deemst him slain unrighteously.

## LEADER.

Thy words be just, yet shame their justice brings ;  
A woman true of heart should bear all things  
From him she loves. And she who feels it not,  
I cannot reason of her, nor speak aught.

## ELECTRA.

Remember, mother, thy last word of grace,  
Bidding me speak, and fear not, to thy face.

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

So said I truly, child, and so say still.

## ELECTRA.

Wilt softly hear, and after work me ill?

## CLYTEMNESTRA.

Not so, not so. I will but pleasure thee.

## ELECTRA.

I answer then. And, mother, this shall be  
My prayer of opening, where hangs the whole :  
Would God that He had made thee clean of soul !  
Helen and thou—O, face and form were fair,  
Meet for men's praise ; but sisters twain ye were,  
Both things of naught, a stain on Castor's star.  
And Helen slew her honour, borne afar  
In wilful ravishment : but thou didst slay  
The highest man of the world. And now wilt say  
'Twas wrought in justice for thy child laid low  
At Aulis ? . . . Ah, who knows thee as I know ?  
Thou, thou, who long ere aught of ill was done  
Thy child, when Agamemnon scarce was gone,  
Sate at the looking-glass, and tress by tress  
Didst comb the twin'd gold in loneliness.  
When any wife, her lord being far away,  
Toils to be fair, O blot her out that day

As false within ! What would she with a cheek  
 So bright in strange men's eyes, unless she seek  
 Some treason ? None but I, thy child, could so  
 Watch thee in Hellas : none but I could know  
 Thy face of gladness when our enemies  
 Were strong, and the swift cloud upon thine eyes  
 If Troy seemed falling, all thy soul keen-set  
 Praying that he might come no more ! . . . And yet  
 It was so easy to be true. A king  
 Was thine, not feebler, not in anything  
 Below Aegisthus ; one whom Hellas chose  
 For chief beyond all kings. Aye, and God knows,  
 How sweet a name in Greece, after the sin  
 Thy sister wrought, lay in thy ways to win.  
 Ill deeds make fair ones shine, and turn thereto  
 Men's eyes.—Enough : but say he wronged thee ; slew  
 By craft thy child :—what wrong had I done, what  
 The babe Orestes ? Why didst render not  
 Back unto us, the children of the dead,  
 Our father's portion ? Must thou heap thy bed  
 With gold of murdered men, to buy to thee  
 Thy strange man's arms ? Justice ! Why is not he  
 Who cast Orestes out, cast out again ?  
 Not slain for me whom doubly he hath slain,  
 In living death, more bitter than of old  
 My sister's ? Nay, when all the tale is told  
 Of blood for blood, what murder shall we make,  
 I and Orestes, for our father's sake ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Aye, child ; I know thy heart, from long ago.  
 Thou hast alway loved him best. 'Tis oft-time so :  
 One is her father's daughter, and one hot

To bear her mother's part. I blame thee not . . .  
Yet think not I am happy, child ; nor flown  
With pride now, in the deeds my hand hath done . . .

[*Seeing ELECTRA unsympathetic, she checks herself.*]

But thou art all untended, comfortless  
Of body and wild of raiment ; and thy stress  
Of travail scarce yet ended ! . . . Woe is me !  
'Tis all as I have willed it. Bitterly  
I wrought against him, to the last blind deep  
Of bitterness. . . . Woe's me !

ELECTRA.

Fair days to weep,  
When help is not ! Or stay : though he lie cold  
Long since, there lives another of thy fold  
Far off ; there might be pity for thy son ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I dare not ! . . . Yes, I fear him. 'Tis mine own  
Life, and not his, comes first. And rumour saith  
His heart yet burneth for his father's death.

ELECTRA.

Why dost thou keep thine husband ever hot  
Against me ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis his mood. And thou art not  
So gentle, child !

ELECTRA.

My spirit is too sore !  
Howbeit, from this day I will no more  
Hate him.

CLYTEMNESTRA (*with a flash of hope*).

O daughter !—Then, indeed, shall he,  
I promise, never more be harsh to thee !

ELECTRA.

He lieth in my house, as 'twere his own.  
'Tis that hath made him proud.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, art thou flown  
To strife again so quick, child ?

ELECTRA.

Well ; I say  
No more ; long have I feared him, and alway  
Shall fear him, even as now !

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Nay, daughter, peace !  
It bringeth little profit, speech like this . . .  
Why didst thou call me hither ?

ELECTRA.

It reached thee,  
My word that a man-child is born to me ?  
Do thou make offering for me—for the rite  
I know not—as is meet on the tenth night.  
I cannot ; I have borne no child till now.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Who tended thee ? 'Tis she should make the vow.

ELECTRA.

None tended me. Alone I bare my child.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What, is thy cot so friendless? And this wild  
So far from aid?

ELECTRA.

Who seeks for friendship sake  
A beggar's house?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

I will go in, and make  
Due worship for thy child, the Peace-bringer.  
To all thy need I would be minister.  
Then to my lord, where by the meadow side  
He prays the woodland nymphs.

Ye handmaids, guide  
My chariot to the stall, and when ye guess  
The rite draws near its end, in readiness  
Be here again. Then to my lord! . . . I owe  
My lord this gladness, too.

*[The Attendants depart; CLYTEMNESTRA, left  
alone, proceeds to enter the house.]*

ELECTRA.

Welcome below  
My narrow roof! But have a care withal,  
A grime of smoke lies deep upon the wall.  
Soil not thy robe! . . .

Not far now shall it be,  
The sacrifice God asks of me and thee.  
The bread of Death is broken, and the knife  
Lifted again that drank the Wild Bull's life :  
And on his breast . . . Ha, Mother, hast slept well  
Aforetime ? Thou shalt lie with him in Hell.  
That grace I give to cheer thee on thy road ;  
Give thou to me—peace from my father's blood !  
[*She follows her mother into the house.*]

## CHORUS.

Lo, the returns of wrong.  
The wind as a changèd thing  
Whispereth overhead  
Of one that of old lay dead  
In the water lapping long :  
My King, O my King !

A cry in the rafters then  
Rang, and the marble dome :  
“Mercy of God, not thou,  
“Woman ! To slay me now,  
“After the harvests ten  
“Now, at the last, come home !”

O Fate shall turn as the tide,  
Turn, with a doom of tears  
For the flying heart too fond ;  
A doom for the broken bond.  
She hailed him there in his pride,  
Home from the perilous years,



In the heart of his wallèd lands,  
In the Giants' cloud-capt ring ;  
Herself, none other, laid  
The hone to the axe's blade ;  
She lifted it in her hands,  
The woman, and slew her king.

Woe upon spouse and spouse,  
Whatso of evil sway  
Held her in that distress !  
Even as a lioness  
Breaketh the woodland boughs  
Starving, she wrought her way.

VOICE OF CLYTEMNESTRA.

O Children, Children ; in the name of God,  
Slay not your mother !

A WOMAN.

Did ye hear a cry  
Under the rafters ?

ANOTHER.

I weep too, yea, I ;  
Down on the mother's heart the child hath trod !  
[*A death-cry from within.*]

ANOTHER.

God bringeth Justice in his own slow tide.  
Aye, cruel is thy doom ; but thy deeds done  
Evil, thou piteous woman, and on one  
Whose sleep was by thy side !

[*The door bursts open, and ORESTES and  
ELECTRA come forth in disorder. Attendants  
bring out the bodies of CLYTEMNESTRA  
and AEGISTHUS.*]

## LEADER.

Lo, yonder, in their mother's new-spilt gore  
Red-garmented and ghastly, from the door  
They reel. . . . O horrible ! Was it agony  
Like this, she boded in her last wild cry ?  
There lives no seed of man calamitous,  
Nor hath lived, like this seed of Tantalus.

## ORESTES.

O Dark of the Earth, O God,  
Thou to whom all is plain ;  
Look on my sin, my blood,  
This horror of dead things twain :  
Gathered as one they lie  
Slain ; and the slayer was I,  
I, to pay for my pain !

## ELECTRA.

Let tear rain upon tear,  
Brother : but mine is the blame.  
A fire stood over her,  
And out of the fire I came,  
I, in my misery. . . .  
And I was the child at her knee.  
'Mother' I named her name.

## CHORUS.

Alas for Fate, for the Fate of thee,  
O Mother, Mother of Misery :  
And Misery, lo, hath turned again,

To slay thee, Misery and more,  
Even in the fruit thy body bore.  
Yet hast thou Justice, Justice plain,  
For a sire's blood spilt of yore !

## ORESTES.

Apollo, alas for the hymn  
Thou sangest, as hope in mine ear !  
The Song was of Justice dim,  
But the Deed is anguish clear ;  
And the Gift, long nights of fear,  
Of blood and of wandering,  
Where cometh no Greek thing,  
Nor sight, nor sound on the air.  
Yea, and beyond, beyond,  
Roaming—what rest is there ?  
Who shall break bread with me ?  
Who, that is clean, shall see  
And hate not the blood-red hand,  
His mother's murderer ?

## ELECTRA.

And I ? What clime shall hold  
My evil, or roof it above ?  
I cried for dancing of old,  
I cried in my heart for love :  
What dancing waiteth me now ?  
What love that shall kiss my brow  
Nor blench at the brand thereof ?

## CHORUS.

Back, back, in the wind and rain  
Thy driven spirit wheeleth again.

Now is thine heart made clean within  
That was dark of old and murder-fraught.  
But, lo, thy brother ; what hast thou wrought . . .  
Yea, though I love thee . . . what woe, what sin,  
On him, who willed it not !

## ORESTES.

Saw'st thou her raiment there,  
Sister, there in the blood ?  
She drew it back as she stood,  
She opened her bosom bare,  
She bent her knees to the earth,  
The knees that bent in my birth . . .  
And I . . . Oh, her hair, her hair . . .  
*[He breaks into inarticulate weeping.]*

## CHORUS.

Oh, thou didst walk in agony,  
Hearing thy mother's cry, the cry  
Of wordless wailing, well know I.

## ELECTRA.

She stretched her hand to my cheek,  
And there brake from her lips a moan ;  
'Mercy, my child, my own !'  
Her hand clung to my cheek ;  
Clung, and my arm was weak ;  
And the sword fell and was gone.

## CHORUS.

Unhappy woman, could thine eye  
Look on the blood, and see her lie,  
Thy mother, where she turned to die ?

ORESTES.

I lifted over mine eyes  
My mantle : blinded I smote,  
As one smiteth a sacrifice ;  
And the sword found her throat.

ELECTRA.

I gave thee the sign and the word ;  
I touched with mine hand thy sword.

LEADER.

Dire is the grief ye have wrought.

ORESTES.

Sister, touch her again :  
Oh, veil the body of her ;  
Shed on her raiment fair,  
And close that death-red stain.  
—Mother! And didst thou bear,  
Bear in thy bitter pain,  
To life, thy murderer ?  
[*The two kneel over the body of* CLYTEMNESTRA,  
*and cover her with raiment.*]

ELECTRA.

On her that I loved of yore,  
Robe upon robe I cast :  
On her that I hated sore.

CHORUS.

O House that hath hated sore,  
Behold thy peace at the last !

---

## LEADER.

Ha, see : above the roof-tree high  
 There shineth . . . Is some spirit there  
 Of earth or heaven ? That thin air  
 Was never trod by things that die !

What bodes it now that forth they fare,  
 To men revealèd visibly ?

*[There appears in the air a vision of CASTOR and  
 POLYDEUCES. The mortals kneel or veil  
 their faces.]*

## CASTOR.

Thou Agamemnon's Son, give ear ! 'Tis we,  
 Castor and Polydeuces, call to thee,  
 God's Horsemen and thy mother's brethren twain.  
 An Argive ship, spent with the toiling main,  
 We bore but now to peace, and, here withal  
 Being come, have seen thy mother's bloody fall,  
 Our sister's. Righteous is her doom this day,  
 But not thy deed. And Phoebus, Phoebus . . .

Nay ;

He is my lord ; therefore I hold my peace.  
 Yet though in light he dwell, no light was this  
 He showed to thee, but darkness ! Which do thou  
 Endure, as man must, chafing not. And now  
 Fare forth where Zeus and Fate have laid thy life.

The maid Electra thou shalt give for wife  
 To Pylades ; then turn thy head and flee  
 From Argos' land. 'Tis never more for thee  
 To tread this earth where thy dead mother lies.  
 And, lo, in the air her Spirits, bloodhound eyes,

Most horrible yet Godlike, hard at heel  
Following shall scourge thee as a burning wheel,  
Speed-maddened. Seek thou straight Athena's land,  
And round her awful image clasp thine hand,  
Praying : and she will fence them back, though hot  
With flickering serpents, that they touch thee not,  
Holding above thy brow her gorgon shield.

There is a hill in Athens, Ares' field,  
Where first for that first death by Ares done  
On Halirrhothius, Poseidon's son,  
Who wronged his daughter, the great Gods of  
yore

Held judgment : and true judgments evermore  
Flow from that Hill, trusted of man and God.  
There shalt thou stand arraigned of this blood ;  
And of those judges half shall lay on thee  
Death, and half pardon ; so shalt thou go free.  
For Phoebus in that hour, who bade thee shed  
Thy mother's blood, shall take on his own head  
The stain thereof. And ever from that strife  
The law shall hold, that when, for death or life  
Of one pursued, men's voices equal stand,  
Then Mercy conquereth.—But for thee, the band  
Of Spirits dread, down, down, in very wrath,  
Shall sink beside that Hill, making their path  
Through a dim chasm, the which shall aye be trod  
By reverent feet, where men may speak with God.  
But thou forgotten and far off shalt dwell,  
By great Alpheüs' waters, in a dell  
Of Arcady, where that gray Wolf-God's wall  
Stands holy. And thy dwelling men shall call  
Orestes' Town. So much to thee be spoke.  
But this dead man, Aegisthus, all the folk

Shall bear to burial in a high green grave  
 Of Argos. For thy mother, she shall have  
 Her tomb from Menelaus, who hath come  
 This day, at last, to Argos, bearing home  
 Helen. From Egypt comes she, and the hall  
 Of Proteus, and in Troy hath ne'er at all  
 Set foot. 'Twas but a wraith of Helen, sent  
 By Zeus, to make much wrath and ravishment.

So forth for home, bearing the virgin bride,  
 Let Pylades make speed, and lead beside  
 Thy once-named brother, and with golden store  
 Stablish his house far off on Phocis' shore.

Up, gird thee now to the steep Isthmian way,  
 Seeking Athena's blessèd rock ; one day,  
 Thy doom of blood fulfilled and this long stress  
 Of penance past, thou shalt have happiness.

LEADER (*looking up*).

Is it for us, O Seed of Zeus,  
 To speak and hear your words again ?

CASTOR. Speak : of this blood ye bear no stain.

ELECTRA. I also, sons of Tyndareus,

My kinsmen ; may my word be said ?

CASTOR. Speak : on Apollo's head we lay  
 The bloody doings of this day.

LEADER. Ye Gods, ye brethren of the dead,

Why held ye not the deathly herd  
 Of Kêres back from off this home ?

CASTOR. There came but that which needs must  
 come

By ancient Fate and that dark word



That rang from Phoebus in his mood.

ELECTRA. And what should Phoebus seek with me,  
Or all God's oracles that be,  
That I must bear my mother's blood ?

CASTOR. Thy hand was as thy brother's hand,  
Thy doom shall be as his. One stain,  
From dim forefathers on the twain  
Lighting, hath sapped your hearts as sand.

ORESTES After so long, sister, to see  
(*who has never raised his head, nor spoken to the Gods*). And hold thee, and then part, then part,  
By all that chained thee to my heart  
Forsaken, and forsaking thee !

CASTOR. Husband and house are hers. She bears  
No bitter judgment, save to go  
Exiled from Argos.

ELECTRA. And what woe,  
What tears are like an exile's tears ?

ORESTES. Exiled and more am I ; impure,  
A murderer in a stranger's hand !

CASTOR. Fear not. There dwells in Pallas' land  
All holiness. Till then endure !

[ORESTES and ELECTRA embrace.]

ORESTES. Aye, closer ; clasp my body well,  
And let thy sorrow loose, and shed,  
As o'er the grave of one new dead,  
Dead evermore, thy last farewell !

[*A sound of weeping.*]

CASTOR. Alas, what would ye? For that cry  
 Ourselves and all the sons of heaven  
 Have pity. Yea, our peace is riven  
 By the strange pain of these that die.

ORESTES. No more to see thee! ELECTRA. Nor thy  
 breath  
 Be near my face! ORESTES. Ah, so it  
 ends.

ELECTRA. Farewell, dear Argos. All ye friends,  
 Farewell! ORESTES. O faithful unto death,  
 Thou goest? ELECTRA. Aye, I pass from  
 you,  
 Soft-eyed at last. ORESTES. Go, Pylades,  
 And God go with you! Wed in peace  
 My tall Electra, and be true.  
 [ELECTRA and PYLADES depart to the left.]

CASTOR.

Their troth shall fill their hearts.—But on :  
 Dread feet are near thee, hounds of prey,  
 Snake-handed, midnight-visaged, yea,  
 And bitter pains their fruit! Begone!  
 [ORESTES departs to the right.]

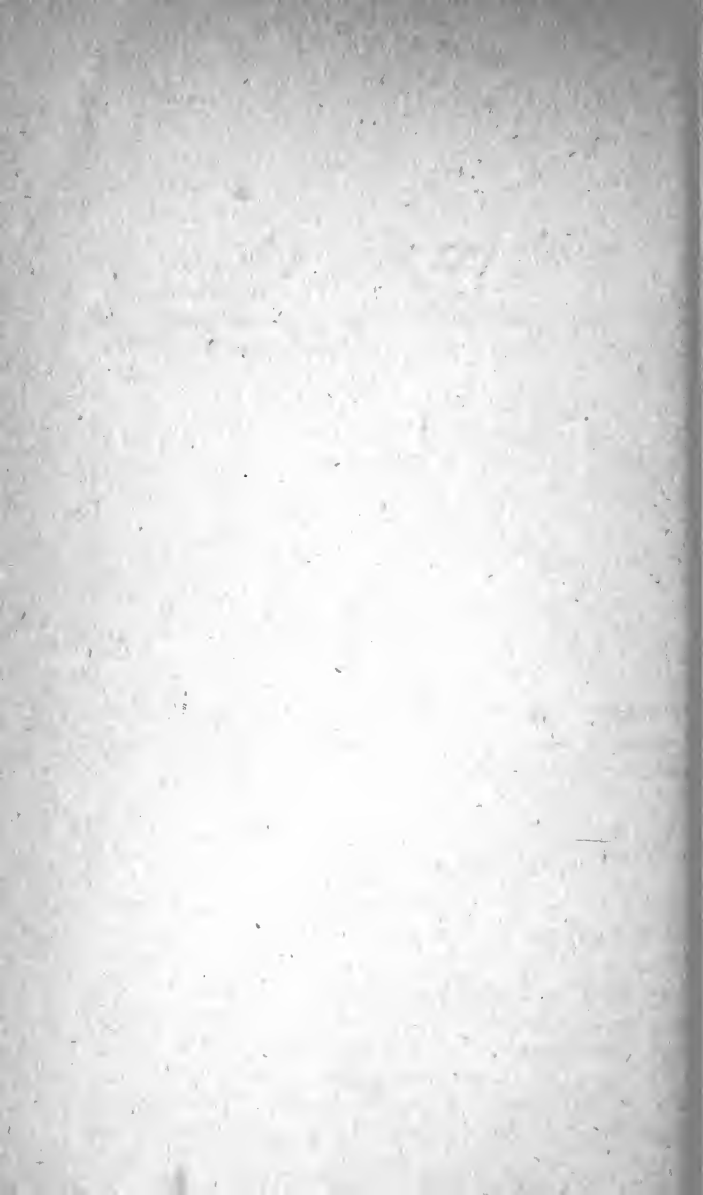
But hark, the far Sicilian sea  
 Calls, and a noise of men and ships  
 That labour sunken to the lips  
 In bitter billows; forth go we,  
 Through the long leagues of fiery blue,  
 With saving; not to souls unshriven;  
 But whoso in his life hath striven  
 To love things holy and be true,

Through toil and storm we guard him ; we  
Save, and he shall not die !—Therefore,  
O praise the lying man no more,  
Nor with oath-breakers sail the sea :  
Farewell, ye walkers on the shore  
Of death ! A God hath counselled ye.

[CASTOR *and* POLYDEUCES *disappear.*

CHORUS.

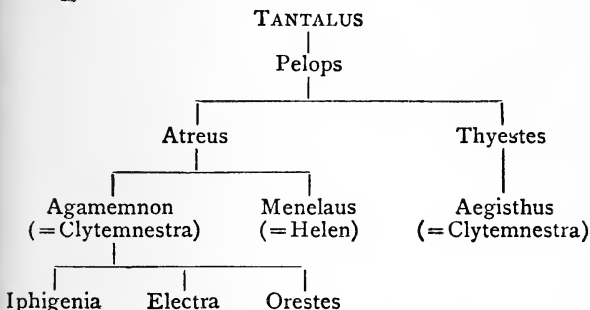
Farewell, farewell !—But he who can so fare,  
And stumbleth not on mischief anywhere,  
Blessèd on earth is he !



## NOTES TO THE ELECTRA

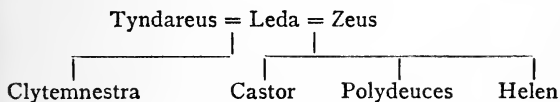
THE chief characters in the play belong to one family, as is shown by the two genealogies:—

### I.



(Also, a sister of Agamemnon, name variously given, married Strophios, and was the mother of Pylades.)

### II.



P. 1, l. 10, Son of his father's foe.]—Both foe and brother. Atreus and Thyestes became enemies after the theft of the Golden Lamb. See pp. 47 ff.

P. 2, l. 34, Must wed with me.]—In Aeschylus and Sophocles Electra is unmarried. This story of her peasant husband is found only in Euripides, but is

not likely to have been wantonly invented by him. It was no doubt an existing legend—an *ὦν λόγος*, to use the phrase attributed to Euripides in the *Frogs* (l. 1052). He may have chosen to adopt it for several reasons. First, to marry Electra to a peasant was a likely step for Aegisthus to take, since any child born to her afterwards would bear a stigma, calculated to damage him fatally as a pretender to the throne. Again, it seemed to explain the name "A-lektra" (as if from *λεκτρὸν*, "bed;" cf. Schol. *Orestes*, 71, Soph. *El.* 962, *Ant.* 917) more pointedly than the commoner version. And it helps in the working out of Electra's character (cf. pp. 17, 22, &c.). Also it gives an opportunity of introducing the fine character of the peasant. He is an *Ἀντουργός*, literally "self-worker," a man who works his own land, far from the city, neither a slave nor a slave-master; "the men," as Euripides says in the *Orestes* (920), "who alone save a nation." (Cf. *Bac.*, p. 115 foot, and below, p. 26, ll. 367-390.) As Euripides became more and more alienated from the town democracy he tended, like Tolstoy and others, to idealise the workers of the soil.

P. 6, l. 62, Children to our enemy.]—Cf. 626. Soph. *El.* 589. They do not seem to be in existence at the time of the play.

Pp. 5-6.]—Electra's first two speeches are admirable as expositions of her character—the morbid nursing of hatred as a duty, the deliberate posing, the impulsiveness, the quick response to kindness.

P. 7, l. 82, Pylades.]—Pylades is a *persona muta* both here and in Sophocles' *Electra*, a fixed traditional figure, possessing no quality but devotion to Orestes. In Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers* he speaks only once, with tremendous effect, at the crisis of the play, to rebuke Orestes when his heart fails him. In the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, however, and still more in the *Orestes*, he is a fully studied character.

P. 10, l. 151, A swan crying alone.]—Cf. *Bacchae*,

p. 152, "As yearns the milk-white swan when old swans die."

P. 11, ll. 169 ff., The Watcher hath cried this day.]—Hera was an old Pelasgian goddess, whose worship was kept in part a mystery from the invading Achaeans or Dorians. There seems to have been a priest born "of the ancient folk," *i.e.*, a Pelasgian or aboriginal Mycenaean, who, by some secret lore—probably some ancient and superseded method of calculating the year—knew when Hera's festival was due, and walked round the country three days beforehand to announce it. He drank "the milk of the flock" and avoided wine, either from some religious taboo, or because he represented the religion of the milk-drinking mountain shepherds.

P. 13, ll. 220 ff.]—Observe Electra's cowardice when surprised; contrast her courage, p. 47, when sending Orestes off, and again her quick drop to despair when the news does not come soon enough.

P. 16, ll. 247 ff., I am a wife. . . . O better dead!]—Rather ungenerous, when compared with her words on p. 6. (Cf. also her words on pp. 24 and 26.) But she feels this herself, almost immediately. Orestes naturally takes her to mean that her husband is one of Aegisthus' friends. This would have ruined his plot. (Cf. above, p. 8, l. 98.)

P. 22, l. 312, Castor.]—I know no other mention of Electra's betrothal to Castor. He was her kinsman: see below on l. 990.

Pp. 22-23, ll. 300-337.]—In this wonderful outbreak, observe the mixture of all sorts of personal resentments and jealousies with the devotion of the lonely woman to her father and her brother. "So men say," is an interesting touch; perhaps conscience tells her midway that she does not quite believe what she is saying. So is the self-conscious recognition of her "bitter burning brain" that interprets all things in a sort of distortion.—Observe, too, how instinctively

she turns to the peasant for sympathy in the strain of her emotion. It is his entrance, perhaps, which prevents Orestes from being swept away and revealing himself. The peasant's courage towards two armed men is striking, as well as his courtesy and his sanity. He is the one character in the play not somehow tainted with blood-madness.

P. 27, ll. 403, 409.]—Why does Electra send her husband to the Old Man? Not, I think, really for want of the food. It would have been easier to borrow (p. 12, l. 191) from the Chorus; and, besides, what the peasant says is no doubt true, that, if she liked, she could find “many a pleasant thing” in the house. I think she sends for the Old Man because he is the only person who would know Orestes (p. 21, l. 285). She is already, like the Leader (p. 26, l. 401), excited by hopes which she will not confess. This reading makes the next scene clearer also.

Pp. 28–30, ll. 432–487, O for the Ships of Troy.]—The two main Choric songs of this play are markedly what Aristotle calls ἐμβόλιμα, “things thrown in.” They have no effect upon the action, and form little more than musical “relief.” Not that they are positively irrelevant. Agamemnon is in our minds all through the play, and Agamemnon's glory is of course enhanced by the mention of Troy and the praises of his subordinate king, Achilles.

Thetis, the Nereid, or sea-maiden, was won to wife by Peleus. (He wrestled with her on the sea-shore, and never loosed hold, though she turned into divers strange beings—a lion, and fire, and water, and sea-beasts.) She bore him Achilles, and then, unable permanently to live with a mortal, went back beneath the sea. When Achilles was about to sail to Troy, she and her sister Nereids brought him divine armour, and guided his ships across the Aegean. The designs on Achilles' armour, as on Heracles' shield, form a fairly common topic of poetry.



The descriptions of the designs are mostly clear. Perseus with the Gorgon's head, guided by Hermês; the Sun on a winged chariot, and stars about him; two Sphinxes, holding as victims the men who had failed to answer the riddles which they sang; and, on the breastplate, the Chimaera attacking Bellerophon's winged horse, Pêgasus. The name Pêgasus suggested to a Greek *πηγή*, "fountain;" and the great spring of Pirênê, near Corinth, was made by Pêgasus stamping on the rock.

Pp. 30-47.]—The Old Man, like other old family servants in Euripides—the extreme case is in the *Ion*—is absolutely and even morbidly devoted to his masters. Delightful in this first scene, he becomes a little horrible in the next, where they plot the murders; not only ferocious himself, but, what seems worse, inclined to pet and enjoy the bloodthirstiness of his "little mistress."

Pp. 30-33, ll. 510-545.]—The Signs of Orestes. This scene, I think, has been greatly misunderstood by critics. In Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers*, which deals with the same subject as the *Electra*, the scene is at Agamemnon's tomb. Orestes lays his tress there in the prologue. Electra comes bringing libations, sees the hair, compares it with her own, finds that it is similar "wing for wing" (*ὁμόπτερος*—the same word as here), and guesses that it belongs to Orestes. She then measures the footprints, and finds one that is like her own, one not; evidently Orestes and a fellow-traveller! Orestes enters and announces himself; she refuses to believe, until he shows her a "woven thing," perhaps the robe which he is wearing, which she recognises as the work of her own hand.

The same signs, described in one case by the same peculiar word, occur here. The Old Man mentions one after the other, and Electra refutes or rejects them. It has been thought therefore that

this scene was meant as an attack—a very weak and undignified attack—on Euripides' great master. No parallel for such an artistically ruinous proceeding is quoted from any Greek tragedy. And, apart from the improbability *à priori*, I do not think it even possible to read the scene in this sense. To my mind, Electra here rejects the signs not from reason, but from a sort of nervous terror. She dares not believe that Orestes has come; because, if it prove otherwise, the disappointment will be so terrible. As to both signs, the lock of hair and the footprints, her arguments may be good; but observe that she is afraid to make the comparison at all. And as to the footprint, she says there cannot be one, when the Old Man has just seen it! And, anyhow, she will not go to see it! Similarly as to the robe, she does her best to deny that she ever wove it, though she and the Old Man both remember it perfectly. She is fighting tremulously, with all her flagging strength, against the thing she longs for. The whole point of the scene requires that one ray of hope after another should be shown to Electra, and that she should passionately, blindly, reject them all. That is what Euripides wanted the signs for.

But why, it may be asked, did he adopt Aeschylus' signs, and even his peculiar word? Because, whether invented by Aeschylus or not, these signs were a canonical part of the story by the time Euripides wrote. Every one who knew the story of Orestes' return at all, knew of the hair and the footprint. Aristophanes in the *Clouds* (534 ff.) uses them proverbially, when he speaks of his comedy "recognising its brother's tress." It would have been frivolous to invent new ones. As a matter of fact, it seems probable that the signs are older than Aeschylus; neither they nor the word *δμόπτερος* particularly suit Aeschylus' purpose. (Cf. Dr. Verrall's introduction to

the *Libation-Bearers*.) They probably come from the old lyric poet, Stesichorus.

P. 43, l. 652, New-mothered of a Man-Child.]—Her true Man-Child, the Avenger whom they had sought to rob her of! This pitiless plan was suggested apparently by the sacrifice to the Nymphs (p. 40). "Weep my babe's low station" is of course ironical. The babe would set a seal on Electra's degradation to the peasant class, and so end the blood-feud, as far as she was concerned. Clytemnestra, longing for peace, must rejoice in Electra's degradation. Yet she has motherly feelings too, and in fact hardly knows what to think or do till she can consult Aegisthus (p. 71). Electra, it would seem, actually calculates upon these feelings, while despising them.

P. 45, l. 669, If but some man will guide me.]—A suggestion of the irresolution or melancholia that beset Orestes afterwards, alternating with furious action. (Cf. Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers*, Euripides' *Andromache* and *Orestes*.)

P. 45, l. 671, Zeus of my sires, &c.]—In this invocation, short and comparatively unmoving, one can see perhaps an effect of Aeschylus' play. In the *Libation-Bearers* the invocation of Agamemnon comprises 200 lines of extraordinarily eloquent poetry.

P. 47 ff., ll. 699 ff.]—The Golden Lamb. The theft of the Golden Lamb is treated as a story of the First Sin, after which all the world was changed and became the poor place that it now is. It was at least the First Sin in the blood-feud of this drama.

The story is not explicitly told. Apparently the magic lamb was brought by Pan from the gods, and given to Atreus as a special grace and a sign that he was the true king. His younger brother, Thyestes, helped by Atreus' wife, stole it and claimed to be king himself. So good was turned into evil, and love into hatred, and the stars shaken in their courses.

[It is rather curious that the Lamb should have such a special effect upon the heavens and the weather. It is the same in Plato (*Polit.* 268 ff.), and more definitely so in the treatise *De Astrologia*, attributed to Lucian, which says that the Golden Lamb is the constellation Aries, "The Ram." Hugo Winckler (*Weltanschauung des alten Orients*, pp. 30, 31) suggests that the story is a piece of Babylonian astronomy misunderstood. It seems that the vernal equinox, which is now moving from the Ram into the Fish, was in the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. moving from the Bull into the Ram. Now the Bull, Marduk, was the special god of Babylon, and the time when he yielded his place to the Ram was also, as a matter of fact, the time of the decline of Babylon. The gradual advance of the Ram not only upset the calendar, and made all the seasons wrong; but seemed, since it coincided with the fall of the Great City, to upset the world in general! Of course Euripides would know nothing of this. He was apparently attracted to the Golden Lamb merely by the quaint beauty of the story.]

P. 50, l. 746, Thy brethren even now.]—Castor and Polydeuces, who were received into the stars after their death. See below, on l. 990.

P. 51, l. 757, That answer bids me die.]—Why? Because Orestes, if he won at all, would win by a surprise attack, and would send news instantly. A prolonged conflict, without a message, would mean that Orestes and Pylades were being overpowered. Of course she is wildly impatient.

P. 51, l. 765, Who art thou? I mistrust thee.]—Just as she mistrusted the Old Man's signs. See above, p. 89.

P. 52 ff., ll. 774 ff.]—Messenger's Speech. This speech, though swift and vivid, is less moving and also less sympathetic than most of the Messengers' Speeches. Less moving, because the slaying of

Aegisthus has little moral interest; it is merely a daring and dangerous exploit. Less sympathetic, because even here, in the first and comparatively blameless step of the blood-vengeance, Euripides makes us feel the treacherous side of it. A *δολοφονία*, a "slaying by guile," even at its best, remains rather an ugly thing.

P. 53, l. 793, Then quickly spake Orestes.]—If Orestes had washed with Aegisthus, he would have become his *xenos*, or guest, as much as if he had eaten his bread and salt. In that case the slaying would have been definitely a crime, a dishonourable act. Also, Aegisthus would have had the right to ask his name.—The unsuspectingness of Aegisthus is partly natural; it was not thus, alone and unarmed, that he expected Orestes to stand before him. Partly it seems like a heaven-sent blindness. Even the omens do not warn him, though no doubt in a moment more they would have done so.

P. 56, l. 878, With guile he hath slain.]—So the MSS. The Chorus have already a faint feeling, quickly suppressed, that there may be another side to Orestes' action. Most editors alter the text to mean "He hath slain these guileful ones."

P. 58, l. 900, It shames me, yet God knows I hunger sore.]—To treat the dead with respect was one of the special marks of a Greek as opposed to a barbarian. It is possible that the body of Aegisthus might legitimately have been refused burial, or even nailed on a cross as Orestes in a moment of excitement suggests. But to insult him lying dead would be a shock to all Greek feeling. ("Unholy is the voice of loud thanksgiving over slaughtered men," *Odyssey* xxii. 412.) Any excess of this kind, any violence towards the helpless, was apt to rouse "The sleeping wrath of the world." There was a Greek proverb, "Even an injured dog has his Erinyes"—i.e., his unseen guardian or avenger. It is interesting, though

not surprising, to hear that men had little love for Electra. The wonderful speech that follows, though to a conventional Greek perhaps the most outrageous thing of which she is guilty, shows best the inherent nobility of her character before years of misery had "killed her soul within."

P. 59, ll. 928 f., Being in falseness one, &c.]—The Greek here is very obscure and almost certainly corrupt.

P. 61, l. 964, 'Tis my mother comes.]—The reaction has already begun in Orestes. In the excitement and danger of killing his enemy he has shown coolness and courage, but now a work lies before him vastly more horrible, a little more treacherous, and with no element of daring to redeem it. Electra, on the other hand, has done nothing yet; she has merely tried, not very successfully, to revile the dead body, and her hate is unsatisfied. Besides, one sees all through the play that Aegisthus was a kind of odious stranger to her; it was the woman, her mother, who came close to her and whom she really hated.

P. 63, l. 979, Was it some fiend of Hell? ]—The likeness to *Hamlet* is obvious. ("The spirit that I have seen May be the Devil." End of Act II.)

P. 63, l. 983, How shall it be then, the same stealthy blow? . . . ]—He means, I think, "the same as that with which I have already murdered an unsuspecting man to-day," but Electra for her own purposes misinterprets him.

P. 64, l. 990, God's horsemen, stars without a stain.]—Cf. above, ll. 312, 746. Castor and Polydeuces were sons of Zeus and Leda, brothers of Helen, and half-brothers of Clytemnestra, whose father was the mortal Tyndareus. They lived as knights without reproach, and afterwards became stars and demigods. The story is told that originally Castor was mortal and Polydeuces immortal; but when Castor was fatally wounded Polydeuces prayed

that he might be allowed to give him half his immortality. The prayer was granted; and the two live as immortals, yet, in some mysterious way, knowing the taste of death. Unlike the common sinners and punishers of the rest of the play, these Heroes find their "glory" in saving men from peril and suffering, especially at sea, where they appear as the globes of light, called St. Elmo's fire, upon masts and yards.

Pp. 64-71, ll. 998 ff.]—Clytemnestra. "And what sort of woman is this doomed and 'evil' Queen? We know the majestic murderess of Aeschylus, so strong as to be actually beautiful, so fearless and unrepentant that one almost feels her to be right. One can imagine also another figure that would be theatrically effective—a 'sympathetic' sinner, beautiful and penitent, eager to redeem her sin by self-sacrifice. But Euripides gives us neither. Perhaps he believed in neither. It is a piteous and most real character that we have here, in this sad middle-aged woman, whose first words are an apology; controlling quickly her old fires, anxious to be as little hated as possible. She would even atone, one feels, if there were any safe way of atonement; but the consequences of her old actions are holding her, and she is bound to persist. . . . In her long speech it is scarcely to Electra that she is chiefly speaking; it is to the Chorus, perhaps to her own bondmaids; to any or all of the people whose shrinking so frets her." (*Independent Review, l.c.*)

P. 65, l. 1011, Cast his child away.]—The Greek fleet assembled for Troy was held by contrary winds at Aulis, in the Straits of Euboea, and the whole expedition was in danger of breaking up. The prophets demanded a human sacrifice, and Agamemnon gave his own daughter, Iphigenia. He induced Clytemnestra to send her to him, by the pretext that Achilles had asked for her in marriage.

P. 66, l. 1046, Which led me to the men he hated.]—It made Clytemnestra's crime worse, that her accomplice was the blood-foe.

Pp. 65–68. As elsewhere in Euripides, these two speeches leave the matter undecided. He does not attempt to argue the case out. He gives us a flash of light, as it were, upon Clytemnestra's mind and then upon Electra's. Each believes what she is saying, and neither understands the whole truth. It is clear that Clytemnestra, being left for ten years utterly alone, and having perhaps something of Helen's temperament about her, naturally fell in love with the Lord of a neighbouring castle; and having once committed herself, had no way of saving her life except by killing her husband, and afterwards either killing or keeping strict watch upon Orestes and Electra. Aegisthus, of course, was deliberately plotting to carry out his blood-feud and to win a great kingdom.

P. 72, l. 1156, For the flying heart too fond.]—The text is doubtful, but this seems to be the literal translation, and the reference to Clytemnestra is intelligible enough.

P. 73, l. 1157, The giants' cloud-capped ring.]—The great walls of Mycenae, built by the Cyclopes; cf. *Trojan Women*, p. 64, "Where the towers of the giants shine O'er Argos cloudily."

P. 75, l. 1201, Back, back in the wind and rain.]—The only explicit moral judgment of the Chorus; cf. note on l. 878.

P. 77, l. 1225, I touched with my hand thy sword.]—*i.e.*, Electra dropped her own sword in horror, then in a revulsion of feeling laid her hand upon Orestes' sword—out of generosity, that he might not bear his guilt alone.

P. 78, l. 1241, An Argive ship.]—This may have been the ship of Menelaus, which was brought to Argos by Castor and Polydeuces, see l. 1278, *Helena*



1663. The ships labouring in the "Sicilian sea" (p. 82, l. 1347) must have suggested to the audience the ships of the great expedition against Sicily, then drawing near to its destruction. The Athenian fleet was destroyed early in September 413 B.C.: this play was probably produced in the spring of the same year, at which time the last reinforcements were being sent out.

P. 78, l. 1249.]—Marriage of Pylades and Electra. A good example of the essentially historic nature of Greek tragedy. No one would have invented a marriage between Electra and Pylades for the purposes of this play. It is even a little disturbing. But it is here, because it was a fixed fact in the tradition (cf. *Iphigenia in Tauris*, l. 915 ff.), and could not be ignored. Doubtless there were people living who claimed descent from Pylades and Electra.

P. 79, l. 1253, Scourge thee as a burning wheel.]—At certain feasts a big wheel soaked in some inflammable resin or tar was set fire to and rolled down a mountain.

P. 79, l. 1258, There is a hill in Athens.]—The great fame of the Areopagus as a tribunal for man-slaying (see Aeschylus' *Eumenides*) cannot have been due merely to its incorruptibility. Hardly any Athenian tribunal was corruptible. But the Areopagus in very ancient times seems to have superseded the early systems of "blood-feud" or "blood-debt" by a humane and rational system of law, taking account of intention, provocation, and the varying degrees of guilt. The Erinyes, being the old Pelasgian avengers of blood, now superseded, have their dwelling in a cavern underneath the Areopagus.

P. 80, ll. 1276 ff.]—The graves of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra actually existed in Argos (Paus. ii. 16, 7). They form, so to speak, the concrete material fact round which the legend of this play circles (cf. Ridgeway in *Hellenic Journal*, xxiv. p. xxxix.).

P. 80, l. 1280.]—Helen. The story here adumbrated is taken from Stesichorus, and forms the plot of Euripides' play *Helena* (cf. Herodotus, ii. 113 ff.).

P. 80, l. 1295, I also, sons of Tyndareus.]—Observe that Electra claims the gods as cousins (cf. p. 22, l. 313), addressing them by the name of their mortal father. The Chorus has called them "sons of Zeus." In the same spirit she faces the gods, complains, and even argues, while Orestes never raises his eyes to them.

P. 80, l. 1300.]—Kêres. The death-spirits that flutter over our heads, as Homer says, "innumerable, whom no man can fly nor hide from."

P. 82, l. 1329, Yea, our peace is riven by the strange pain of these that die.]—Cf. the attitude of Artemis at the end of the *Hippolytus*. Sometimes Euripides introduces gods whose peace is not riven, but then they are always hateful. (Cf. Aphrodite in the *Hippolytus*, Dionysus in the *Bacchae*, Athena in the *Trojan Women*.)

P. 82, l. 1336, O faithful unto death.]—This is the last word we hear of Electra, and it is interesting. With all her unlovely qualities it remains true that she was faithful—faithful to the dead and the absent, and to what she looked upon as a fearful duty.

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Additional Note on the presence of the Argive women during the plot against the King and Queen. (Cf. especially p. 19, l. 272, These women hear us.)—It would seem to us almost mad to speak so freely before the women. But one must observe: 1. Stasis, or civil enmity, ran very high in Greece, and these women were of the party that hated Aegisthus. 2. There runs all through Euripides a very strong conception of the cohesiveness of women, their secretiveness, and their faithfulness to one another. Medea, Iphigenia, and Creusa, for instance, trust

their women friends with secrets involving life and death, and the secrets are kept. On the other hand, when a man—Xuthus in the *Ion*—tells the Chorus women a secret, they promptly and with great courage betray him. Aristophanes leaves the same impression; and so do many incidents in Greek history. Cf. the murders plotted by the Athenian women (Hdt. v. 87), and both by and against the Lemnian women (Hdt. vi. 138). The subject is a large one, but I would observe: 1. Athenian women were kept as a rule very much together, and apart from men. 2. At the time of the great invasions the women of a community must often have been of different race from the men; and this may have started a tradition of behaviour. 3. Members of a subject (or disaffected) nation have generally this cohesiveness: in Ireland, Poland, and parts of Turkey the details of a political crime will, it is said, be known to a whole country side, but not a whisper come to the authorities.

Of course the mere mechanical fact that the Chorus had to be present on the stage counts for something. It saved the dramatist trouble to make his heroine confide in the Chorus. But I do not think Euripides would have used this situation so often unless it had seemed to him both true to life and dramatically interesting.

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

HISTORY OF ANCIENT GREEK LITERATURE  
ANDROMACHE: A PLAY.

CARLYON SAHIB: A PLAY.

THE EXPLOITATION OF INFERIOR RACES,  
IN ANCIENT AND MODERN TIMES: AN  
ESSAY IN 'LIBERALISM AND THE EMPIRE.'

EURIPIDIS FABULAE: BREVI ADNOTATIONE CRITICA  
INSTRUCTAE, VOLS. I. and II.

EURIPIDES: HIPPOLYTUS; BACCHAE; ARISTOPHANES'  
'FROGS.' Translated into English verse.

EURIPIDES: THE TROJAN WOMEN. Translated into  
English verse.

EURIPIDES: ELECTRA. Translated into English verse

EURIPIDES: MEDEA. Translated into English verse.

EURIPIDES: IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS. Translated into  
English Verse.

THE RISE OF THE GREEK EPIC.

A C







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